

Malcolm Saville

Where's My Girl?



A LONE PINE
ADVENTURE

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Where's my Girl?

Malcolm Saville

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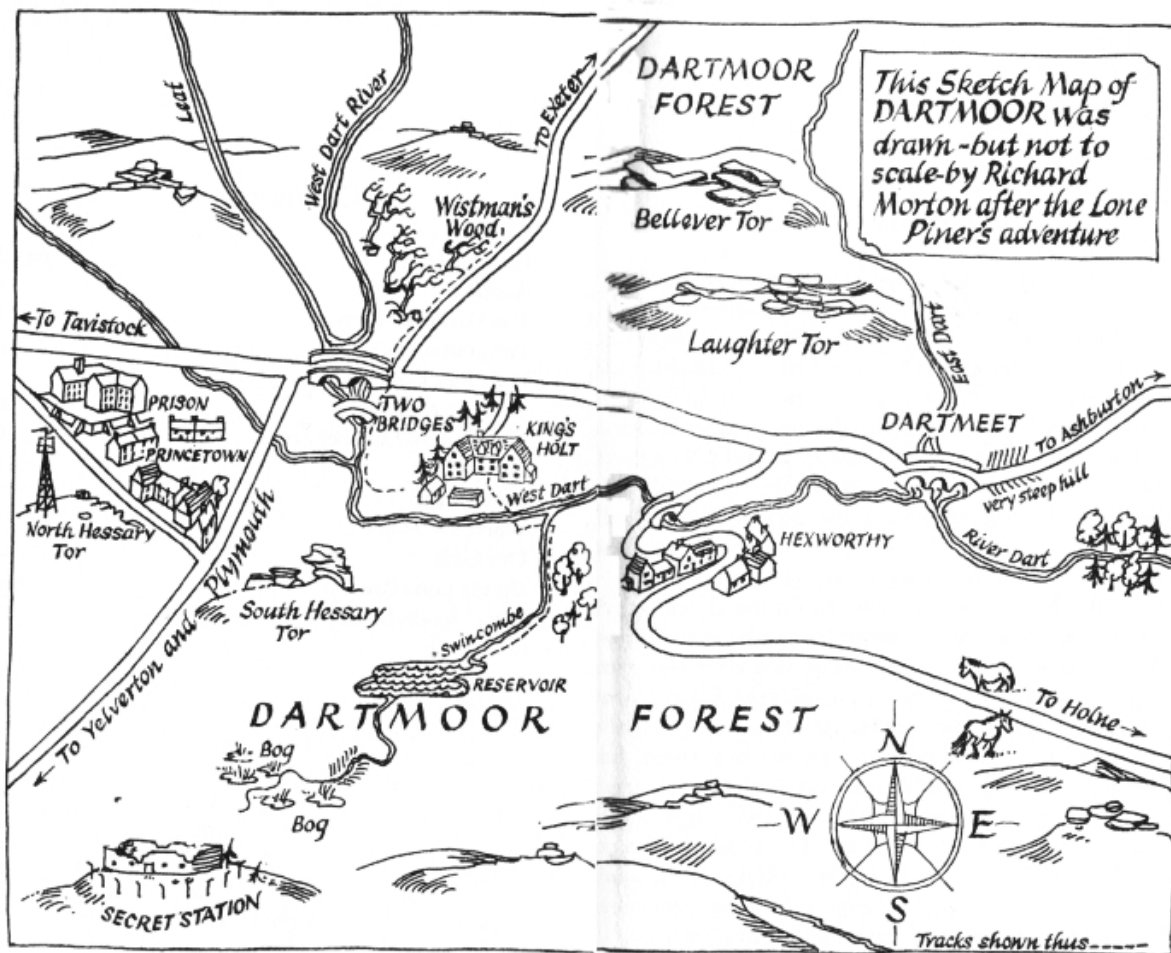
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Foreword

This is the nineteenth story about the group of boys and girls who founded a secret club in the house called Witchend in a remote valley in the Shropshire hills. Because the site of this camp was marked by a solitary pine tree they called their club Lone Pine, and they are now known as the Lone Piners in many parts of the world. Many boys and girls, since 1943 when the first book called *Mystery at Witchend* was published, have formed their own Lone Pine clubs. They have tried to keep the simple rules of the first Lone Piners, the most important of which is "To be true to each other whatever happens".

Over the years, many readers have asked that the fictional Lone Piners should not get any older in years, but this has not been possible. Some changes there must be in a series spanning so many years, and so the four eldest members have now left school. They have changed, naturally enough, in their attitudes to the decade in which they are now living, and are very much more aware of what they mean to each other, and that is not a bad thing. The irrepressible twins are also a little older than in the earlier stories. Many readers ask me if the Lone Piners ever existed or whether they are based on any boys and girls I have known. They are not, and neither are the adults in any of my stories. They are all imaginary and have no reference to any living person.

But every Lone Pine adventure has taken place in a part of Britain which you can explore yourself. This book is set on Dartmoor in Devon, and many of you reading these words may have crossed the Moor by one of two roads - one from north to south and the other, as you will read in this story, from east to west. Yet those who glimpse the Moor from a car or motor coach will never really know it nor catch more than a glimpse of its mystery, its sometimes forbidding grandeur. But if you do go, I must explain what is real and what is not. Ashburton is real and so is Dartmeet, Two Bridges and Princetown. So of course is Plymouth, but Rosemary Lane is entirely imaginary. Brixham is real and you can see the fishing boats coming in as Dan Sturt did, but what happened to the *Lucky Girl* is no reflection on the fishermen of that fascinating little port. There really is a Wistman's Wood

and you will find it marked on the 1 inch Ordnance Map of Dartmoor. There is a Swincombe river but no mysterious "secret station" high on the Moor above the bog where that river rises, nor is there a house called King's Holt, although the idea behind what happened there is possible.

Finally I must say that Tom's loss of memory and its recovery is possible but not probable.

The Lone Piners' first adventure at King's Holt is *Saucers Over the Moor*.

M.S.

The Lone Pine Club

There are now nine fictional members of the original club, but it is not usual for them all to appear in one story. The following are featured in this one:

DAVID MORTON - Nearly 18. Just left school and lives and works in London. He is the Captain and co-founder of the Club.

RICHARD (DICKIE) AND MARY MORTON - David's identical twin brother and sister. Nearly 11.

PETRONELLA (PETER) STERLING - A few months younger than David to whom she is devoted. Now works in a riding stable at Ludlow. Really the founder of the Club when she first met the Mortons who had come to Witchend. Has no mother but lives now with her retired father at Witchend.

TOM INGLES - The eldest Lone Piner. Born a Londoner but now lives with his uncle and aunt and helps to work the farm which bears their name about half a mile from Witchend.

JENNY HARMAN - 17-year-old redhead. Lives with her father and stepmother who keep the village store and post office in the village of Barton Beach near the Stiperstones where she was born.

There are three other members who do not appear in this story. Jonathan (Jon) and Penelope (Penny) Warrender are cousins who have also left school but live in Rye in Sussex, and Harriet Sparrow who lives in London and is a particular friend of the twins.

Also worthy of mention is Macbeth, the Mortons' Scottie dog who, like Mary's lamb, goes everywhere with Mary Morton. The twins say that he is a member and he has certainly earned his membership by the way he keeps the all-important rule.

1. Accident

"Here you are, love," Mrs. Ingles said smilingly to Jenny Harman, who had just cycled over to the farm from her home at Barton Beach. "Here's Tom's tea and I've put in another mug for you. He's been on that combine harvester most of the day and he'll be ready for a breather. He's in Top Field, but you know your way about Ingles now, don't you?"

Jenny took the basket and looked at her affectionately. Aunt Betty, as she called her, was Tom Ingles' aunt, and no relation of hers. But Jenny was devoted to her, particularly as she did not get on well with her stepmother.

"It looks a super tea. More like a dinner. Thank you, Aunt Betty. It's lovely to be here again. How's Uncle Alf? Have we got to share some of this with him?"

"No, Jen. He's left Tom to finish off Top Field on the new combine on his own this afternoon. He's probably in the milking sheds with Bill. You'll see him later. Off you go now, and if you get bored talking to Tom, you can always come back here and have another cup with me."

So Jenny ran out into the harvest sunshine, as happy as any girl of seventeen could be on her way to meet her boy friend whom she had not seen for a week. A pretty redhead with an eager, freckled face, Jenny was slight and slim, impulsive and warm-hearted but never vain. She looked down at her old jeans and dusty shoes without a fear that Tom would mind what she was wearing, although he would surely notice her green checked shirt because he knew she liked green.

She could hear the combine harvester now. Last time she was at Ingles, Tom had shown her the wonderful machine which Uncle Alf had bought for this year's harvest. Being as sure as she could that one day she was going to be a farmer's wife, Jenny had tried to be interested when Tom told her about the ungainly blue monster at rest in the farmyard. She was not really interested in anything mechanical and while Tom was telling her how this

thing cut the corn, threshed it, dried the grain and bundled up the straw, she had just been thinking how nice he looked.

Ever since she had crossed the farmyard this afternoon, she had heard the combine growling away in the distance. Now that she was only one field away the noise was louder but more varied as Tom drove it up and down the dwindling rectangle of grain. She glanced up as the noise of the combine engine increased and saw the top of the monster moving along above the hedge dividing the two fields. She guessed correctly that Tom would turn in a few moments and drive up the hill away from her. So there was no need to hurry.

She reached the gate and stopped to get her breath. The harvester, as she had expected, was rumbling away from her up the hill. From behind, it really did look like a fantasy monster from another world. She could see Tom's red shirt and fair head and he looked very small and insignificant to be controlling so large a machine which did so much without his help. No need to run after him. Soon he would turn at the top of the hill and see her. Perhaps he would stop the machine, and those flailing things in front which beat down the standing corn would slow down as the noisy engine was stilled. Then he would see her waving, and jump out of the driving seat and saunter - Tom rarely hurried - down the field through the stubble to her. Then he would put his arm round her shoulders and say, "Hello, Jen. How's my girl?"

That's what he'll do, Jenny thought, and now he's got to the top of the uncut bit and he'll turn-----

Suddenly the rhythmic beat of the engine changed. There was a grinding noise as the great combine made the turn and then lurched and began to topple on its side. Jenny, dumb with horror, saw Tom thrown from the driving seat and the scarlet of his shirt was like a patch of blood on the golden stubble.

She dropped the basket and began to run, stumbling on the hard, stony ground while the stuttering engine of the combine still broke the silence of the summer evening.

Jenny's race up the hill was like a nightmare. Her legs ached, her ankles were scratched by the sharp stubble, her heart thudded with the strain and although she prayed that Tom would get up and run down to comfort her, the patch of scarlet did not move. And the engine rumbled on as a cloud of starlings whirled above the tree tops at the top of the field just as if nothing unusual had happened.

Tom was lying on his back. His face was pale under the tan and his eyes closed. As Jenny stumbled down on her knees beside him she saw that one of the driving wheels of the combine had come off and that Tom had been thrown only a few feet clear of the machine which looked as if it might fall right over at any moment and crush them both.

She called his name and raised his hand to her face but there seemed no life in it. Then, very tenderly, she lifted his head and realized that it had struck a big stone when he was thrown clear, but there was no blood on her fingers. Above her the engine of the combine still throbbed menacingly, but there was nothing she could do to stop it, and she knew that she must drag Tom away from it lest it toppled over on its side.

She crouched behind him and tried to get her hands under his arms to drag him clear. Jenny sobbed with frustrated effort and anger because she was not strong enough to move him. With horror she suddenly wondered if he were dead. She lifted his head again and held it with one hand and with the other dragged at the stone until her nails broke and she was able to move it away. Then she tore open his shirt and with her head on his chest, sobbed with relief as she felt his heart beating.

With the realization that he was alive she sat back on her heels and took a deep breath. Gradually she fought back the panic of the last few minutes and recovered some of her common sense. All that she could do now was to get help and that was not far away.

She stood up, but her knees were shaking so much that she tripped and fell after a few steps down the field. Five minutes ago she had been so happy that she had even forgotten her quarrel with her stepmother this morning who had told her that she spent too much of her time at Ingles. She had also hurt her father, who hated her to be rude to his wife however much he

approved of Tom. And now her happy world had crumbled about her. As Jenny raced down the hill she prayed that she would not have to run as far as the farm, and her prayers were answered because as she stumbled through the gate into the Low Field she saw Alf Ingles hurrying up towards her. She tried to call him but no words came. She fell again and was on her knees when the farmer reached her and lifted her to her feet.

"All right, Jenny love," he said as he held her close. "Take it easy. Tell me quick what's wrong. Where's Tom?"

"Up there. Under the combine. One of the wheels came off and he was thrown out. I can't move him, Uncle Alf. He's too heavy. But I did try. Honestly I did. His head hit a stone. I know he's not dead because his heart is beating. You must move him away from that awful thing..."

"O.K. Jenny. Run back to the farm. Tell Betty what's happened and ask her to find Bill and send him up with a hurdle so that we can carry Tom down if he can't walk."

"Move him away from that awful thing," Jenny whispered. "It could fall on him. I'll come back with you first just to see if he's still all right."

"You'll do as I say, Jen. You can stop by the gate here and see me move him and then you'll go back to the farm. That's what you can do to help him, and if the combine was going over on its side it would a' done so afore now... So be a brave girl and pull yourself together."

She stood away from him, nodded and watched him as he hurried through the gate. Then she followed him a few yards, saw him lift Tom easily and raise his arm to her. As she ran down to the lane she realized that he had stopped the combine's engine.

Mrs. Ingles looked up in surprise as Jenny pushed open the kitchen door, collapsed in a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"Tom's hurt, Aunt Betty. Uncle is with him now and wants Bill to go up at once with a hurdle to fetch him down... I saw it happen. A wheel came off the combine..."

When she looked up she was alone and she was still sitting upright in her chair when Mrs. Ingles returned.

"Bill's on his way. Tell me everything while I make us both some tea."

"I don't want tea. I don't want anything but for Tom to be all right... How can you talk about cups of tea when he's up there not speaking or moving..."

"You'll do what I tell you, Jen. O'course you're upset. I reckon you did all you could to help. You'll be no good to him nor to anybody else if you don't take care of yourself. Now calm down, be a brave girl and tell me everything from the beginning."

Mrs. Ingles was devoted to Jenny and was frightened by the girl's shocked appearance as she sat stiff and upright in her chair, clasping and unclasping her trembling hands.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Betty. Of course I'll have some tea. But you've got to tell me the truth. Could Tom die? You know he says I'm his girl. I am, aren't I? I want to know *now* if he's going to be all right... If we'll all have him back again... like he was..."

As Mrs. Ingles' arms went round her, the tears began to flow. After a few minutes Jenny felt better, released herself gently and groped for her handkerchief.

"You're wonderful to me," she gulped. "I don't know what I'd do without you all and the farm... But Tom will be better, won't he?"

"I'm sure he will if Alf is looking after him. Go and wash your face and tidy yourself. You look like you've been dragged through a hedge backwards, love. Your tea will be ready when you come down and if you're quick you'll be looking quite nice by the time the men come in. Be off with you."

Jenny was calmer after a few sips of scalding sweet tea and when she heard voices in the farmyard she ran to open the kitchen door. Mr. Ingles and Bill were carrying Tom on the hurdle, and although the farmer smiled

reassuringly she felt sick with fear when she saw Tom's pale face and closed eyes.

Then Mrs. Ingles took charge.

"Put him on the sofa, Alf, and while I'm putting a blanket round him you'd better ring the hospital and say you'll bring him over at once." Her husband nodded as they rested the hurdle on the kitchen table and then lifted Tom in his arms and laid him on the sofa.

"Will do," he said. "Thanks for your help, Bill, and I'd be obliged if you'd get the car out. Now will you two women listen and try not to fuss. I reckon Tom is concussed. No bones broken but he's been knocked out. Lucky Jen was not far off when it happened. Lucky too I was on my way up to Top Field to see how he was getting on when I heard the change in the sound of the engine. Driving wheel came off as he turned at the top of the field. Not Tom's fault... Now Jen, no more tears. We'll soon have him home again but he must go to Shrewsbury and be X-rayed. I'll telephone now."

Jenny followed him to the door and then ran back as Aunt Betty whispered, "He's coming round now. His eyes are open."

For a moment Jenny stood staring at him and then, as he struggled to sit up, she went down on her knees beside him.

"Speak to me, Tom. You're home now and everything will be all right. Look at me, Tom. It's Jenny and here's Aunt Betty."

But Tom looked round in bewilderment and then stared wide-eyed at her with a puzzled frown.

"Don't look at me like that," she pleaded. "It's me, Tom. Jenny! I found you by the combine... I was bringing your tea. Tom... speak to me... Say you're better... I'm your girl, Tom. You promised I was..."

A long silence was broken only by the loud ticking of the grandfather clock in the corner. Then Tom raised both hands to his head.

"Where am I?" he demanded in a voice they scarcely recognized. "I dunno what you're all talking about. Where's my girl, anyway?"

Mrs. Ingles raised Jenny gently.

"Don't be hurt, love. Let him be. He's still dazed and must take his time. Don't fuss him," but Jenny sensed a hint of fear behind the kindly words.

Tom lay back and closed his eyes again. He did not move when there came a cheerful knock on the door and Petronella Sterling walked in.

Peter, as almost everybody called her, was nearly a year older and three inches taller than Jenny. The two girls were entirely different in temperament and in looks as Peter was a blue-eyed blonde, a good rider and a fine swimmer. She had left school and now worked in a riding stable in Ludlow.

Her smile of welcome faded as Jenny ran forward and she saw Tom.

"Oh, Peter! Tom's had an accident. He's going to hospital. Come outside and I'll tell you everything."

Mrs. Ingles sat down beside Tom but before Peter could reply the farmer came back into the room and smiled at her.

"Glad you looked in, Peter. Keep Jen company, will you? Tom's had a bang on the head and I'm taking him to Shrewsbury now for X-ray. He'll be O.K. How is he, Betty? Can he walk? Has he said anything?"

Jenny left Peter and stood small and defiant in front of Mr. Ingles who looked down at her in astonishment.

"Yes, he has spoken. He doesn't know where he is or who I am and he didn't recognize Aunt Betty. You keep saying he's going to be O.K. but how do you know? Nobody knows but I think he's very ill and I'm telling you now that I'm not leaving Tom until I know he's going to be all right and being looked after properly. And being all right means that he knows who I am..."

She paused, choked back a sob and then whispered, "You see, I'm his girl. He said so..."

"Yes love, we know that, but he must go to hospital now and the car is ready. You can stay here and look after Aunt Betty and I'll telephone soon as they've had a look at him... And maybe Peter can keep you company too..."

Jenny held her red head high.

"I'll help you get him in the car, Uncle Alf. I'm coming too. I tell you again that I'm not leaving Tom until he knows I'm with him. I'll tell the hospital too-----"

"That will do, Jenny," Mrs. Ingles said. "Calm down, dearie, and just think for a moment. We can't let you go off to Shrewsbury on our responsibility."

"What do you mean? I'm going. I'm ready now."

"No, Jen," Uncle Alf said firmly. "Your aunt is right. Telephone home now and ask your father or mother-----"

"She's not my mother. She's my stepmother and she doesn't understand about Tom and me and she doesn't want to. If Dad is out and she answers and I try to explain she'll say 'No'... I know she will. But you understand and I won't telephone. Let's go now."

Mr. and Mrs. Ingles looked at each other in surprise and as Tom opened his eyes again and tried to sit up, Peter stepped forward.

"Please let Jenny go and of course I'll go with her. We'll stick together with Tom. My father will understand if you'd telephone him and explain, Aunt Betty. He knows that Jen is with you and I said I'd look in to see her on my way home. And if you don't want to telephone Barton Beach I'm sure Dad would... Hello, Tom. What have you been doing to yourself? You're going to hospital to be examined and Jen and I are coming with you... Up the Lone Piners!"

She stooped and held out her hands to him.

"Come on, Tom. Let's go. Uncle Alf has got the car ready and Jenny is coming with us."

He took her hands and looked round vaguely but it was obvious that he had no idea where he was or who they all were.

Mrs. Ingles shrugged and turned to her husband.

"Take them, Alf. I'll do the telephoning and I'll be waiting for you to call me from the hospital... There, there, Jenny! You're a little spitfire but your heart is in the right place. Be off with you, and I'll make it right with your father. As for you, Petronella, nobody is likely to say that you don't stand by your friends."

They did not have much difficulty in getting Tom into the car. He was unsteady on his feet, but Mr. Ingles held him firmly by one arm and Jenny clung to his hand on the other side.

"He'd better sit in front with me," Uncle Alf proposed as he opened the car door. "More room."

"He doesn't want lots of room," Jenny said firmly. "He wants more company. He'll sit in the back between us girls. We'll look after him."

Mr. Ingles gave up the struggle. He had never met this determined Jenny Harman before.

The journey to Shrewsbury was without incident. Tom said nothing and after a while seemed to be sleeping. Peter tried to give Jenny something else to think about for she had seen the glint of tears on her face.

"I wanted to see you specially today, Jen. I would have come in to Ingles anyway on my way home, but I had a wonderful letter this morning..."

"From David, I s'pose. Is he O.K.?"

"I think so. This letter was from Penny in Rye and it's most exciting news for all of us, Jenny - for all the Lone Piners except-----"

Tom was now slumped between them with his eyes closed and, after a glance at his stricken face, Jenny snapped at Peter.

"I can't understand you. Can't you see how ill he is? How do we know what they're going to do with him when he gets to hospital? I don't care what Penny says, and I don't want to hear about her letter. Save it up and talk to David about it. Tell all the others, but don't expect me to get excited. I don't care about anything or anybody except Tom and nothing matters except that he gets well again and everything is the way it was before."

Whether or not Mr. Ingles, intent on his driving, heard this outburst the girls never knew. He said nothing, and Peter, who had only meant to remind Jenny of the friendship of the other Lone Piners, was silent too. As they drove into the outskirts of Shrewsbury, Tom muttered a few words and looked round him but he still did not recognize them and when Jenny began to plead with him, Mr. Ingles spoke sharply and told her not to bother him.

When they drew up at the hospital outside the doors marked "Casualty", a porter helped Tom into a wheelchair and, with Mr. Ingles, pushed him to the Reception Desk. A nurse told the two girls that they must go to the waiting room at the end of the corridor and when Jenny protested, Uncle Alf said sharply,

"Pull yourself together, Jenny. You can't help Tom by making an exhibition of yourself. Look after her, Peter, and I'll be with you soon as I've seen the doctor."

The waiting room was depressing with twelve chairs set stiffly round bare walls of pale green. The table in the middle offered some old magazines and there were some sweet papers on the floor. Nobody else was waiting.

Peter sat down and Jenny stood by the table. Neither of them spoke for about three minutes and then Jenny announced in a small voice, "I feel a bit sick."

"I don't feel too good either," Peter admitted. "You might try sitting down and relaxing. I'm sure there will be a canteen here and when Uncle Alf comes we could have a coffee or something. But don't be sick here, please. There's sure to be a place down the corridor if you want it."

"You're being horrible to me, Peter. You don't care."

Peter stood up.

"I do care about Tom. We all care and everybody is trying to help him. And here's Uncle Alf."

"I've seen the doctor. Decent young chap. Tom is being X-rayed now. They'll let us know just as soon as they see what the photos show... There's a young couple just come in with a scalded baby... Not too good - so we're not the only ones with troubles, Jen. Stick around here while I telephone Aunt Betty, will you?"

"Sorry about what I said in the car," Jenny said when Mr. Ingles had gone. "Don't be mad with me, Peter. It's just that if I wasn't sure before, I know now that nothing at all matters except that Tom will be all right and recognize me. Presently, when we really know and I've seen him and he speaks to me, then I'd like to hear your news. Please understand, Peter."

Before Peter could answer the door opened and a dishevelled young man came in. He gave them a quick glance, nodded a greeting and then picked up one of the magazines and looked at it upside down.

"We're sorry about your baby," Jenny said suddenly. "That's why you're here, isn't it? How is he - or is it she?"

"She's called Rose. She was two yesterday. We left her in the kitchen for a minute and she climbed on a chair and pulled the kettle off the cooker... How did you know?"

Peter told him about Mr. Ingles. Then the young man asked why they were there. So Jenny told him about the combine and Tom not remembering anything or knowing them. The man said he knew a chap who had been

concussed and he had been a bit peculiar for two or three weeks. After that he never could remember the accident. Then Peter asked about his wife and he said she was wonderful and braver than he was. Presently Uncle Alf returned to say a nurse had told him that Tom seemed brighter, but the doctor had not seen the photographs yet.

Another quarter of an hour passed in this way and Peter suddenly realized that Jenny, in her interest for little Rose and her parents, was forgetting her own troubles. She looked up and caught Alf Ingles' eye understandingly. Then the door opened and a pretty young nurse smiled at them.

"Is there a girl here called Jenny?" she asked. "We've got a young man here who wants to see her."

2. The Dartmoor Pony

A week after the events described in the last chapter, a presentable young man called Dan Sturt drove his scarlet Mini Clubman up to a small cafe called The Moorland Pixie in Princetown on Dartmoor. Some say that this small town has the worst climate in England, and it is certainly one of the highest towns, standing between the North and South Hessary Tors at a height of over 1,400 feet above sea level. Nothing happens there in the winter, when more often than not it is shrouded in mist and rain. But in summer hundreds of coaches stop there so that tourists may gape at the hideous prison which was built in 1806, and feed the Dartmoor ponies that wander about the main street.

Some years ago Dan's widowed mother came here from the Midlands and courageously opened the Pixie in the hope of making herself independent of her son who had just left school and got a job with a newspaper in Plymouth. He did well, and when his mother was established with no more financial worries, he took a chance and started on his own as a freelance journalist. He worked for any newspaper which would take his stories and for radio and television too. His smart little car was known all over Devon and his cheerful personality made him many friends in the West Country. Sometimes he was away for a night or two, but as he was fancy free he still lived over the cafe. Mrs. Sturt was a proud and devoted mother, and when he was out of the house, she could be relied upon to take telephone messages, and more than once had heard something in the cafe which led Dan to a story.

On this particular September evening Dan left his Mini outside the Pixie in case there was a message which would send him out again. Two hikers were making the most of a generous tea as he breezed through the cafe into the little kitchen where his mother was sitting down reading a newspaper.

"Hello, Mum! Had a good day? Any messages?"

"Not bad, Dan. Soon as that couple go we'll close up and you can tell me what you've been up to... Yes, there's a letter for you with postmark Rye,

Sussex and somehow that rings a bell. And Dan I've got some news for you about King's Holt. I've had an interesting visitor, but I'll tell you about that when you've read your letter and I've got rid of the hikers."

Dan grinned and went into the little room off the kitchen which he had furnished as his office. Here was the telephone, a small table for his typewriter, a shelf of reference books, two chairs and a desk. On the desk was a big bulky envelope, addressed in a black, impetuous handwriting, the recollection of which brought a smile to his lips as he sat down.

The writer was surely the pretty girl called Penelope Warrender whose parents had rented King's Holt just off the Ashburton road not far from Dartmeet, a couple of years ago. He had become involved with a bunch of her young friends in an astonishing adventure concerning prototypes of flying saucers which were being tested at a secret station high on the Moor by the source of the river Swincombe, south of Hexworthy (See *Saucers over the Moor*). The place was deserted now but the affair had made national news and was Dan's first real scoop for his paper.

As he slit the envelope he remembered that the others called the girl Penny - or Newpenny - because of the colour of her hair. There was another pretty girl in the party too - a blue-eyed blonde with plaits. Both had decent boy-friends, and a pair of cheeky young twins and their Scottie dog made up a lively party.

Well! Well! Penny the redhead and Peter, short for Petronella, with the plaits. Why should Penny write to him? As he thumbed through about ten pages he wondered with dismay whether this was something he was expected to answer. Dan was not keen on letter writing, but if somebody had something to say at this length, there might be a story in it somewhere. So he sat back, put his feet up on the desk and waded in.

Gay Dolphin Hotel,

Dear Dan,

I don't suppose you really remember me after all that commotion we had with the others at King's Holt, but I'm Penny Warrender. I haven't forgotten

you and neither have my parents, and I'm writing now because we think you may be able to help us. I won't waste time by telling you about me and Jon except that my parents, who want to be remembered to you, are just going to take us touring in France for three weeks.

But this is it. What I want to tell you, I mean. It's about King's Holt. My father always liked the place and some months ago he bought it and I expect you've seen that a lot of alterations have been made. He thought the place was going to waste, so with a Colonel and Mrs. Longden who have a sort of money arrangement with him they are going to turn King's Holt into a rather superior Guest House for people who are keen on riding. Pony trekkers and that sort of lark. I'm not a horsey girl but of course Peter is, - you must remember her. She's still absolutely gorgeous and now works in a riding stable up in Ludlow. Anyway, the Longdens will be in charge and they've moved in now. They came to the Dolphin and they're a super couple. Marjorie, the wife, will do the riding business and I think they've bought a few ponies already and built new stables, and her husband Bill, who is a smashing handsome type, will do the managing. It's late in the season to open now but the Longdens say that they will welcome visitors who hear about it and will make bookings for Christmas and after. Anyway Bill and Marjorie were very anxious to get in quickly and they're bringing a Cypriot family to help run it until they have to increase the staff when they really get booked up. The husband will be the porter and his wife will cook and there's a daughter who I expect is very Mediterranean and glamorous. When Dad fixed this up with them he said it was a pity that the four Warrenders couldn't come down and see what it was like, but the Trench tour has been fixed since Easter and Jonathan, who you will remember is inclined to be bossy, has planned the complete visit and made bookings. We feel we must go because we've got a French friend called Arlette who lives in Paris and we've arranged to take her so we couldn't very well give up the trip now...

Dan sighed and put the unread sheets on the desk. He was feeling exhausted, but come to think of it, she wrote exactly as she used to speak. And there was a story here because there had been rumours of rebuilding going on at King's Holt and the idea of a hotel specializing for riders was clever. He remembered Mr. Warrender as a very pleasant type. And, just now, his mother had surely mentioned King's Holt? It might be amusing to

see the place again. But what did this impetuous girl want him to do? He picked up the rest of the letter as Mrs. Sturt came into the room.

"Here you are, Mum. I'm still working on this girl's letter and you'd better start at the beginning while I go through to the end," and he passed her the pages he had read.

The letter continued:

... Anyway I'm coming to the point now. When we knew that the Longdens were anxious to move in as soon as possible and wouldn't mind having a few guests, I had a brainwave. You remember David Morton and the twins from London and Peter from Shropshire? Of course you do. I mentioned her about six pages back. Well we've written to ask them if they would like to go to King's Holt as our guests. There are two more friends called Jenny and Tom in Shropshire too and they don't often get holidays and of course they could come too, if they can. The Longdens came to stay with us at the Dolphin and we told them our idea. I think they were surprised - and I bet they will be when they see the twins - but Dad made it clear that we would like them to come if they could. So by the time you read this letter - I've nearly finished now - we may have heard that they're almost on their way and I hope you'll go and see them all. The other thing is that if you are still doing the clever things on your newspaper you might think that the new King's Holt is worth a story. Will you do that if you can, please Dan? I know my parents would be pleased if you could give us a bit of a start. We're sure keen people will come to K.H. if they know about it and of course they'll do meals for callers in. If all goes well we might all come down for Christmas. Then I can wish you a happy one instead of sending a card.

Now I'm as tired out as you must be. Jon, who has read this, wishes you all the best and I send my love to your mother who was very kind to us all.

Yours,

Penny (Warrender)

P.S. Please write back.

"This girl is fantastic," Dan said as he passed his mother the rest of the letter. "Take it slowly, Mum. She takes your breath away... Who was your visitor this afternoon who talked about King's Holt?"

Mrs. Sturt said nothing until she had finished the letter. Then she laughed and took off her spectacles.

"I remember them, Dan. They were a grand lot. I remember Penny and the other fair girl and those cautions of twins... This afternoon's visitor was Colonel Longden. He stayed to have a cup of tea and a good chat. A pleasant gentleman and very frank about what he hopes to make of King's Holt. And he's promised to send visitors to the Pixie if they ask for a tea place in Princetown. I liked him, Dan, and told him about you and he was very interested. I see what your friend Penny means about publicity for the new venture. Maybe you could help them?"

"Maybe I could, Mum. And something for the telly, too. Why did he come, though? Just to say 'Hello'?"

"No. There was something else, Dan. It's in the kitchen. I'll fetch it."

He followed her into the next room, and to his surprise she took from the mantelpiece a block of wood about half the size and thickness of a brick.

"See Dan. There's a carving on the front of a Dartmoor pony and very good it is. The Colonel does these himself and told me that wood carving is his hobby. Said he had the idea soon as they knew they were coming here and he's going to make a side-line of them. He's going to sell them at King's Holt and says we can have the agency in Princetown. I reckon we'd sell plenty in the full season. I'll make a show of them in the window and you can design a card for me. 'Carved by hand by a local craftsman' he suggested. What do you think, Dan? Maybe you could interview him in his workshop while he's working on them."

"So I could. Don't know what I'd do without you, Mum."

The little model was certainly an attractive novelty, and although he was not an expert Dan could see that the pony, in relief, had been carved with skill

and knowledge of the subject. He ran his fingers over the outline sympathetically and admired the proud carriage of the pony's head. Dan was keen on riding and when he had time went over to a stable at Ashburton and hired a Dartmoor. He knew what a good, sure-footed, strong and capable breed they were which was not surprising considering that in their wild state they had literally to scratch for a living in the winter on the rugged, rock-strewn slopes and bogs of the Moor.

"It's good, Mum, but how is he ever going to find the time to produce these by hand and run a hotel? He must use a stencil or something on each block of wood, but he certainly knows what he's doing. How much does he want for them?"

"Fifty pence each and I reckon we could get seventy-five. He'll let us have them on sale or return so we don't run any risks. Now listen, Dan. When I told him about you and your work he was very interested and said that he and his wife looked forward to meeting you. I asked him straight out whether they were doing any advertising yet and he said 'No', but they were expecting a few people who they had told about the experiment and some others who would act as agents for his Dartmoor ponies. I believe his wife has just bought a few riding ponies. Why don't you go over there after you've had your tea, make yourself known to them and have a look round? I'm sure you'll get on well with the Colonel and you can see for yourself whether it's worth getting in first with an interview. It's only seven o'clock now."

"So I will, Mum. This chap might be on to something. But I wonder how long Mr. Warrender will have to wait to get his money back if they're spending such a lot now... Let's have our tea together in the cafe. I'll do bacon and eggs."

An hour later, when the sun was going down over King's Tor, Dan turned the Mini in the side street and headed to the left down the hill towards Two Bridges and the main road which linked Tavistock in the west to Ashburton on the eastern edge of the Moor. On his left was the grey bulk of the prison and above that on the skyline the gaunt slope of North Hessary Tor crowned with its television mast. Dan never tired of the Moor. He knew it in all its moods now and the curiously shaped and named summits of the tors were

familiar to him. He recognized them in the clear days of spring, and the long hazy days of summer; he knew where they were hiding in the mists of autumn and shrouded in the great rain clouds of winter. Now, in the evening light, beyond the stone walls on each side of the road, the Moor - purple, brown and green - rolled away into the distance. Far away, on the other side of the main road the setting sun was lighting up the rocky summits of Laughter Tor and Believer Tor.

At the bottom of the hill he turned right at Two Bridges and took the Ashburton road. The entrance to King's Holt was on the right about four miles further on and as he turned into the drive he noticed that the open gate was freshly painted white and two new posts, one on each side of the entrance, carried a sign board bearing the words King's Holt in black letters on a white background. No mention of a hotel or that it was open to non-residents, Dan noticed and wondered whether a little less modesty might not be helpful. He remembered that the drive, between two rows of dark pines, had been in a dangerously bad condition, but it had now been well repaired and as he switched on his headlights he saw that the grass verges had been levelled and widened to make two soft rides for horses. He drove up to the front of the house which was built of the grey granite from the Moor and realized that it really was being smartened up. There was a soft light in one of the downstairs windows, a smell of wood smoke and the sound of a man's tenor voice singing in a foreign language.

Dan got out and stretched. He wondered whether it was rather a cheek to call like this at nine o'clock in the evening without telephoning first. He remembered that there was a big yard and stables behind the house and a track up to the Moor which came down very sharply to the backs of some of the outhouses. When he had first found the house it was empty and he had discovered an owl's nest in the loft above the stable. He was tempted to stroll round there now to see what the yard looked like, when a light went on over the porch and a smart looking woman stepped out and greeted him politely.

"Good evening. I can't see you very well in the dusk but can I help you?"

Dan explained who he was and apologized for calling at this time.

"My mother runs the Moorland Pixie cafe in Princetown. Colonel Longden came to see her this afternoon and left one of his carved ponies. I'm very impressed and wondered whether we could fix a television interview. My mother suggested that I come round this evening, but if the Colonel would rather see me tomorrow, I could telephone in the morning. I'm particularly interested in King's Holt because I've been in the house before, and it's a coincidence that I should know Mr. and Mrs. Warrender from Rye. I had a letter from their daughter today and she told me that some of her young friends who I also know, are coming here for a holiday."

"Then you must come in and have coffee with me. And what you tell me is sufficient reason for me to call you Dan. My husband told me about your mother and he'll be delighted that you like his Dartmoor ponies. It doesn't do for me to tell him too often, but I think he's very gifted. The trouble is that it's so difficult to get him out of his workshop... Come on, Dan. I'll tell Bill you're here and I know he'd like to show you round."

She led him into a pleasant bright lounge and when she switched on a second light they looked at each other. Then she laughed. "We couldn't see who we were talking to out there in the dark, could we, Dan... Shake hands and I hope we shall be friends. We don't know anybody here yet although lots of friends and acquaintances in London and from Bill's army days have promised to drop in and see us. Now make yourself comfortable while I go and find Bill and order some coffee."

Dan sat on the edge of an enormous armchair of white leather and considered the situation. No wonder Penny had been impressed by the Longdens. His hostess was certainly charming, and very good looking. Dan did not know Mr. Warrender well, but he remembered that when he had rented King's Holt before, he was on leave from a big job in the East. As he looked round the room again he could not help thinking that somebody in this partnership must have a lot of money.

The door opened and a man came in carrying a tray with a silver coffee pot and milk jug and three cups. He was slim and dark and wearing black trousers and a black polo-necked jersey. He looked round the room in surprise and then smiled at Dan with a flash of white teeth and wished him "Good evening" in a slight accent.

So this is one of the Cypriots, Dan thought. The man looked at him curiously before putting the tray down, then turned as Mrs. Longden came in. "Thank you, Marios," she said, and then to Dan as she poured the coffee:

"Bill is still in the workshop but he'd like to meet you and suggests that I bring you over when we've finished our coffee. As soon as we get really busy he won't have as much time for his carving, so he's making as many ponies as he can now. Now tell me about these friends of Penny's from London and Shropshire. I hear that one of the girls works in a riding stable so I shall be very glad to have her here while we're on the lookout for some more ponies - I've got three already. I hope they'll enjoy themselves, but we have told Penny to explain that we shall have some visitors from time to time - these old friends I mentioned just now, for instance. And then if you are able to give us some publicity we shall get some people coming in for meals and buying Bill's ponies, and perhaps they'll also come for weekends."

She offered him a drink which he declined and told him to call her Marjorie which he found difficult. After a while he realized that she was asking him more questions than he had managed to ask her, so he got up, thanked her, and suggested that he come back tomorrow when the Colonel was not so busy.

"I'm sorry, Dan. I realize I was chattering but truth is that I'm glad of company sometimes when Bill forgets everything but his carving. We'll go and see him now."

It was almost dark when she led him round the side of the house.

"We've practically rebuilt the back of King's Holt, Dan, and I don't suppose you'll recognize it. We reduced the size of the two wings which took up so much of the yard but added a new floor to each of them. So now we've got a bigger yard, more room for stables and garages and space for Bill's workshop. They had to dig into the Moor to make the space we wanted. You'll be surprised, Dan."

As they turned the corner into the enlarged yard, he was at once aware that she had not exaggerated the alterations. The first thing he noticed was the

faint glow of light from behind the window blinds of the Colonel's workshop which was set against the face of the granite cliff that had been cut to make room for it. Then he realized that in front of the door was a small van. There was still enough light in the sky for him to read the inscription on the side:

ANTIQUES
ANCIENT HOUSE
BRIXHAM

Before he could step forward, Marjorie took his arm and turned back to the house. "I'm so sorry, Dan. Do forgive me. I didn't hear the van, and Bill didn't mention that this friend of his would be coming here this evening. He's fascinated by his work and I believe he's going to offer to sell some of the ponies in his shop. I think we'll leave them together now, because I know Bill will want to talk to you alone - just the three of us, I mean... Ring up tomorrow when you've got a moment and we'll fix a time."

Dan was mildly surprised at being shunted off like this, but she still held his arm so there seemed no sense in protesting. But he really was shocked when they turned into the drive. The porch light was still on and he was amazed to see a girl opening the door of his car.

"Chryssi," Marjorie called. "What are you doing?"

The girl, although obviously surprised, turned with a smile to Dan. She was about his own age, dark and very pretty.

"Forgive me, sir. I am taking the walk and I see the smallest, smartest car I ever see in England. I would like much to ride in it. Please may I sit in her."

Dan gallantly held the door open and with another flashing smile she slid gracefully into the driving seat.

"That will do, Chryssi," Marjorie said without much enthusiasm. "This is Mr. Sturt who is going to help us with publicity for King's Holt, but he wants to go home now."

Chryssi laughed at Dan and slid out as gracefully as she had got in.

"Thank you very much. She is lovely. I like to ride in her one day... What does this word mean, please?" and she pointed to the label with the word PRESS on the windscreen.

"I work for a newspaper," Dan explained. "Good night, Chryssi."

She left them reluctantly and Marjorie was obviously put out as she apologized. "I'm sorry, Dan. Chryssi is a nice girl but she hasn't long been in England. She is Marios' daughter and Cypriot as you possibly guessed. They're wonderful and enthusiastic workers, but it looks as if Chryssi is more interested in cars than ponies... Come and see us again soon, Dan, but better ring up first so that we can be sure that Bill is available... Goodnight."

She walked back to the house as Dan started the engine.

He was very thoughtful as he drove home.

3. Two Journeys

The Morton family lived in an old-fashioned house in Brownlow Square in North London. David and twins Dickie and Mary were to leave Paddington at 13.30 for Exeter and were due to arrive at 16.22 when they would be met by Colonel Longden. Peter, Jenny and Tom would also be waiting for them as their train from Birmingham should have arrived nineteen minutes earlier. Mrs. Morton was going to take them to Paddington in the car and told them to be ready soon after noon, having offered them substantial refreshment at eleven.

"I'm worried about myself," Dickie remarked as he looked without enthusiasm at the plate of sandwiches. "I think I'm sickening for something vile."

"It isn't really worth mentioning that you're often sickening in a different way," David remarked as he helped himself. "You had an enormous breakfast and you are now so excited that you won't be able to face food until we're in the train... Not to worry about yourself. Look at your twin. She's not hungry either, are you duckie?"

Mary, sitting on the edge of a chair, looked coldly at her elder brother.

"We don't think you're funny, David. You're excited too, thinking about meeting Peter. We are now going to take Mackie for another little walkies round the square. When he comes back he might like a little something."

When the front door closed behind them Mrs. Morton poured herself some coffee.

"I suppose they'll amuse themselves at King's Holt, David. Please telephone tonight and let me know you've arrived safely. It sounds rather an odd arrangement but you'll keep an eye on them, won't you? I'm glad Jenny and Tom are coming too. Have you told the twins about Tom's loss of memory?"

"They know about his accident and that he's been in hospital. Peter and Jenny asked me not to talk too much about it because they weren't absolutely sure that the doctor would let him come. When Peter telephoned last night to say it was O.K. she said Jenny had been in a state, but I'll warn the twins in the train so that they don't ask Tom awkward questions. He still doesn't remember anything about falling off the combine. Nasty business... Let's start in good time, Mother. Traffic is sure to be bad, and I'd rather have time to spare at Paddington. Don't fuss about us. If it doesn't work we can always come home but the riding will be marvellous for Peter and anyway, we do know something about the Moor."

When the twins came back they each had a sandwich and gave one to Macbeth when their mother was not looking and David was busy packing their bags into the car. Dickie was still a little pale but nodded agreement when Mary said, "We like going off for a holiday don't we, twin, but we don't really like leaving everything *here* and whatever happens when we're away it's always lovely to come home."

"That's right and it's exciting going because we can't possibly know what's going to happen to us even on the way to the station... Let's see if they've got all our things in."

Mary clipped Mackie's tartan lead to his collar and then kneeled to give him a hug.

"We know you hate trains and stations and change my darling, but you must be a brave dog and before you know where you are you'll be galloping over Dartmoor and guarding us like anything."

Mrs. Morton was in the driving seat and David beside her and they were fastening their safety belts when Mary got in with Macbeth. Dickie, still on the pavement, suddenly clapped a hand to his head.

"Wait!" he shouted dramatically. "Wait for me. It's not here. You've forgotten it. I've forgotten it. You would have let me go without it and I'll never forgive any of you if you don't wait for me."

Mrs. Morton passed him the door key and asked Mary what he had left behind.

Mary giggled. "Just for once I don't know. And don't look so pained and superior, David. He won't be more than half an hour."

A few minutes later Dickie charged down the steps flourishing a telescope.

"My 'scope!" he panted triumphantly. "Why didn't one of you remind me? I can't go to Dartmoor without my 'scope for observing things with... Wild life f'rinstance and the night sky."

"And David and Peter," Mary added. "Get in, Dickie, and don't upset Mackie with that thing. He doesn't like it and he wants to sit up and say 'Goodbye' to Brownlow Square."

Mrs. Morton was an experienced driver and as she knew London well, she always used side streets when she could. The traffic was as heavy as usual, the sun was hot and David was just thinking that he really had got them off too early when Dickie's prediction that they never knew what was going to happen came unpleasantly true.

"I don't suppose you noticed, David," Mrs. Morton was saying, "but this street is called Paradise Lane. It's usually a good short cut but there seems to be a bit of a traffic jam ahead where it joins the main road."

She changed down to second gear and cruised along slowly behind a large van. Mary, complaining that Macbeth was suffering from the heat, wound down her window and leaned out as her mother stopped the car. Not being able to see past the van, she asked Mary what was holding them up.

"There's a big car parked outside a shop on the other side, Mummy, but something funny is going on. There's a lot of glass on the pavement. The window's broken. Somebody's shouting and here's a man running this way. He's frightened or angry."

Dickie tried to pull his sister aside so that he could see what was happening, and at that moment the van in front of them moved forward a few yards so

that they could all see ahead. David was the first to realize their danger when he heard a sharp crack and the man running towards them shouted, "He's got a gun. He's dangerous. He shot that copper..."

"Get *down*, twins," David yelled as he leaned forward to switch off the engine. Macbeth, barking furiously, was pulled down by Mary as David put his arm round his mother, freed her safety belt, and held her down so that her head was on his lap.

There was more shouting, another shot and the sound of the siren of an approaching police car.

"What is it, David?" his mother gasped. "Are the twins all right? Please let me up."

"It's a raid on a jeweller's shop. There's a chap outside with a gun and he's just shot a policeman. Stay down and keep still but keep that dog quiet, Mary... *Do as I say...*"

For a few seconds there was an almost uncanny quiet in the street. The engine of the van in front was still ticking over and they could hear another car too, but apart from that there were no footsteps and no voices. Then the wailing of the police car's siren sounded nearer in the main road and the man with the gun shouted, "Nobody move. I'm in business. See what happened to the copper... Get in quick, mate," and there followed the sound of footsteps cracking the broken glass and the slamming of a car door.

"You in that van," the hoarse voice threatened again. "Keep your head down or I'll have you."

Another slammed door, and the roar of the gang's car as it moved forward towards them. David looked up cautiously and realized that the van in front of them was moving to the right in an attempt to ram the escaping car. Then came another shot, the van swerved to the left and stopped. With screaming tyres the crooks' car mounted the pavement and with inches to spare, accelerated past them and David glimpsed the driver crouched over the wheel. There were two men in the back, one of whom was leaning from the

window with a gun in his hand. Then they had gone as the police car turned into the end of the street.

Mrs. Morton sat up and to his surprise David realized that Dickie, behind him, was also on his feet.

"Like the telly," he whispered. "Only worse. We're all right, Mum, but we heard it all and we didn't like it. What about the policeman?"

"I must see if I can do anything," David said. "We can't get on until the police say so, Mother, and I think the driver of the van may be hurt. Don't any of you move until I come back."

When he returned ten minutes later he was pale and shaken.

"The policeman is unconscious but not dead and the ambulance is on the way. The jeweller was beaten up and the van driver has got a bullet wound on his hand. That's three brave men to remember. I wonder if the crooks will get away. The van driver got the number and description of their car. I told the police we had a train to catch and they're coming soon to ask us some questions."

They caught their train with four minutes to spare. Mrs. Morton insisted that they should go as planned, and although the twins were subdued, David was more worried about leaving his mother who would have to see the police again.

"Your father will look after me, David. I promise to telephone him as soon as your train has gone and you can ring us tonight from King's Holt. I feel all right now and I shall tell him how proud I was of you... Give my love to Peter and the others and I want to know about Tom... Goodbye, twins. Try not to worry too much. Look after David and I shall tell Daddy you were very brave and sensible."

The guard blew his whistle, Mary leaned from the window and waved to her mother as the train began its long journey.

"I want to be by ourselves," Dickie announced. "We don't want to talk to anybody else and be friendly."

David knew what he meant but they had to struggle with their luggage and Macbeth through several coaches before they found an empty compartment. Here the twins sat down side by side and watched their brother stow their bags on the rack.

"Thank you, David," Mary said. "I don't think we feel very well."

"Neither do I, Mary. What about you, Richard? Shall I put your telescope up here with the rest of our things or are you going to observe the passing scene with it until we get to Exeter? Of course you are. Give your telescope to Mary and come and help me fetch something from the Buffet Car. We mustn't starve ourselves."

When they had finished their meal and Reading was behind them, Dickie, after a glance at his twin, turned to his brother and rather hesitatingly said, "There's something special I want to ask you, David, and you must answer truthfully. I must know it and I'm sure Mary thinks the same... That policeman this morning. You don't think I saw him lying on the pavement, but I did. If he dies, David, it will mean that the man with the gun is a murderer, won't it?"

"Yes, Dickie, it will. And he tried to kill the driver of the van too - the man who tried to stop him escaping - but he's not badly hurt."

"There were three men who escaped in the car," Mary said. "I saw them close. They were horrible and their faces were covered with something sort of slippery. What was it? Why did they look like that?"

"They didn't want to be recognized, Mary. They pulled nylon stockings over their faces... Don't worry too much about it. Try to forget them."

"I don't think I'll ever do that, David. Why do they want to steal and kill people? Haven't they got any money? Where do they get the gun to kill people with? You can't buy guns in shops, can you? Why did he shoot the policeman?"

David did his best to explain but found it difficult. Dickie, more than Mary, seemed impressed by the fact that some of the violence he had often seen on television could actually happen in real life. David did not tell them any more than was necessary for fear of distressing them further. Instead he tried to change the subject by reminding them of King's Holt.

"I expect we'll meet Dan Sturt again and you'll have to behave yourselves with him, because Penny told me on the telephone the other night that Dan is on his own now and does television and radio interviews as well as writing for papers."

Dickie brightened.

"We remember Dan. He was O.K. after we'd shown him a few things. We wouldn't mind being on the telly with him and I bet he'll be surprised when we tell him about this morning."

"We might allow him to do an interview with Mackie on the telly," Mary suggested. "Could you do some tricks for Dan, my precious? It's a pity he's not a trick dog, but of course he's always too busy looking after us... Perhaps you'd like to tell us now what Peter said to you on the telephone last night, David. This is something which always interests us *very* much. And we would like to know how Tom is because this is the very first time that Tom and Jenny have come away on a holiday with us."

With relief, David realized that they were getting back to normal.

"Tom is better, Mary. Peter rang up to say that he had seen the doctor again and can come today. There's one thing we didn't tell you before because Jenny was so upset and didn't want anyone to know, but after that awful crack on the head there are, or there were, some things that Tom couldn't remember. He still can't remember the accident but he's well enough to come away, and the doctor is sure it will do him good. Peter says that Jenny is more upset about this than Tom, but if he does seem a bit strange and forgetful, don't take any notice, will you? Don't ask him about the accident or the hospital... This big station is Taunton so we shan't be long now"

"We thought there was a bit of mystery about Tom that you hadn't told us," Mary said. "We can always tell. Don't worry. We'll look after Thomas although sometimes he's rude and bossy to us. I bet Jenny is in a state so we must be kind to her too. I'm not sure about Dickie but I'm a bit depressed about this holiday. We're not all that keen on horses, so what do Dickie and I do when you and Peter go riding and Tom and Jenny don't want us? It seems a bit peculiar that although all this is because of the Warrenders, Jon and Penny aren't coming."

Dickie climbed on the seat and reached for his telescope.

"The Club is breaking up," he said gloomily. "Here we are alone in this compartment all this time and nobody who even looks like a villain has come in. That's the way an adventure begins and the extraordinary thing is that I just don't care. We're getting old or something. It's unnatural for us not to want something exciting to happen but I've had enough for one day... There's just one bright thought, Mary. I wonder if we're going to like this Colonel bloke who is meeting us. He'll need a bus for us all."

David began to get the luggage down and only smiled when Mary said, "I shall look after Mackie as usual and we'll both look the other way when you meet Peter, David. Don't worry about us."

But David was not worrying about them as he leaned out of the window when the long train glided gently to a stop. He saw the others - or Peter rather - before they saw him. She was wearing a sky-blue dress with a scarlet scarf at her throat and her hair gleamed like gold in the sunshine as she looked eagerly up the train. Just behind her was Jenny chattering to Tom and looking up at him as usual.

Mary, trying to see under David's arm, shouted, "I see them but that doesn't look like Tom. He's all dressed up in best clothes."

David opened the door, helped the twins and Mackie out and then began to lift the luggage onto the platform. Mary and the dog made an unpopular dash through the crowd towards Peter. David felt his heart thump as she stepped forward to meet them, looking beyond Mary until she saw him. Then Jenny was dragging Tom forward and suddenly they were all together

again. Peter's fingers were clasped in David's own, while Jenny stood on tip-toe to greet him with a kiss. Although for a few moments they all seemed to be talking at once, it was David who first realized that Tom, standing just behind Jenny, had a smile on his face but was not saying much. Then Mary noticed this too, and as the train drew out of the station and there was a lull in the conversation, she was heard to say, "Hello, Thomas. My twin and me want you to know that it's super you being here with us. Up at Ingles you think you can boss us about, but it will be different on Dartmoor. You look very, very nice Tom, and very smart in that superior and smashing suit. If, sometime privately you told me the date of your birthday - about a year ahead will be best - I will knit you a tie."

He was pale under his tan but when he laughed he looked more like the old Tom who always teased them, but was always as ready to help them in a crisis as David.

"I'll tell you privately, Mary. You can ask Jen and she'll tell you that I said I'd only come on this trip if you and Dickie were coming too - and Mackie, of course," he added hurriedly as he rumbled Mary's hair with one hand and stooped to pat Macbeth with the other.

"Listen, David," Jenny was saying. "We've met Colonel Longden already. He's outside waiting for us with a smashing, great white estate car. He's smashing too - very, very handsome and smooth and said we'd better get our greetings over before he met us all together."

"Here he comes now," Peter said quietly. "Got tired of waiting, I suppose."

Jenny's description of him was fair enough, David thought as he shook hands with the tall, bare-headed man who smiled and said, "Name of Longden. You must be David Morton. And the twins Richard and Mary, I believe. How do you do?"

The twins regarded him politely and extended their right hands simultaneously. Mackie, anxious to be gone from railway stations which he hated, wagged his tail and so they all proceeded amicably to the station yard. There was room for Tom and Jenny on the front seat of the big estate car with the Colonel, and when all their luggage was packed in the back

David pointed out that there was plenty of room there for the twins and Macbeth as well.

Mary had just opened her mouth to protest when a scarlet Mini pulled up behind the Colonel's car. The door opened and a laughing young man jumped out.

"Hi there!" he called. "Hi, Peter. Remember me? Dan Sturt from Princetown."

Dan was certainly presentable. Handsome, good-humoured and self-assured. Hair not too long, still clean-shaven. Gay patterned shirt with tie to match.

He stepped forward to shake hands with Peter, and David noticed that he could hardly take his eyes from her. "Maybe you remember the twins and me too," David remarked grimly. "How did you know we were on this train? Anyway we're sure to see you soon as we're staying at King's Holt... Come on, Peter. The Colonel is waiting for us."

"Come off it, David," Dan laughed as they shook hands. "I know the Colonel and he told me what train you were coming on and Penny wrote and told me your plans. I had to come to Exeter this morning and thought I could give you a hand with the luggage. I've got to go past King's Holt anyway. Hello, twins. Remember me? You look more alike than ever and I shall have to get you on the telly. Special interview. Still got your hound, I see. Should have thought he was about ready for an old dogs' home, but he looks spry enough... Good morning, Colonel. I was just offering Peter and the twins a lift. What do you say, Peter? You're looking gorgeous and David can spare you for an hour."

The twins, attracted by the idea of a television interview, looked at each other meaningfully before Mary spoke for them both.

"Thank you, Daniel. You are not forgotten by us, but you must subtract what you said about an old dogs' home."

"No doubt you said that in jest," Dickie added. "It is some time since we have met so you have forgotten that such remarks about our middle-aged and extremely intelligent dog are unfunny."

Colonel Longden, hearing the twins in action for the first time, looked mildly surprised. He also noticed Peter's flushed face and that David was not making much effort to hide his displeasure.

"Go as you please," he smiled. "We'll meet at King's Holt. I'll take this gorgeous redhead with David and Tom."

Dan smiled cheerfully to Jenny and promised that he was looking forward to seeing her later, and then hustled the twins and Macbeth into the back of the Mini. And almost before she knew where she was, Peter found herself sitting beside him and being helped to buckle her safety belt.

"Which way would you like to go, twins? Did you know that I first met Peter when I pinched her bike down at Dartmeet? Shall we go that way through Ashburton? The Moor is just the same except that there are more cars than ever and more visitors. You'll never recognize King's Holt, but one of the reasons I wanted a word with you, Peter, is that Penny told me you were now at a riding school. The Longdens have got three ponies at present so you'll be useful to them no doubt, but I ride quite a bit now and hire from Ashburton. Maybe we could ride together sometimes?"

"That would be lovely, Dan. We'll fix something up with David when we've settled in. Now tell us about these Longdens and how you got to know them. And what does King's Holt look like now?"

As he drove south down the A38 through Chudleigh and Bickington, he told them about the alterations at King's Holt, the Colonel's skill as a wood-carver and his new workshop where his Dartmoor Ponies were made.

"I was serious about the TV," he went on. "Longden's keen on publicity for King's Holt and his carvings. I'd like to fix an interview with him, and you could all be busy in the stables with the ponies and that sort of caper. No business of mine but it seems to me they'll have to make a lot of money to

make it pay. There's hard work to be done there, but it is a clever idea and very attractive... Good to see you again, Peter."

They turned right in Ashburton and were soon crawling down the hill between the woods to get their first sight of the Dart tumbling under lovely Holne Bridge. From there up on to the Moor with an exciting view of the Tors whichever way they looked, and then down to Dartmeet.

The twins were subdued in the back seat, but as they passed the turning on the left to Hexworthy, Dickie asked what had happened to the secret station high up beyond the source of the Swincombe where they had met on their first Dartmoor adventure.

"Almost a ruin now, Dickie. I've never been up there since, but you might go. We'll be at King's Holt in ten minutes... We didn't pass the Colonel so he's sure to be there before us unless he turned off the road anywhere."

Peter did not intend to ask Dan any more questions about the Longdens who, after all, were friends of their friends. But it did occur to her that he was puzzled and curious about what was going on at King's Holt and wondered why the Lone Piners had been asked.

The Mini pulled up in front of the porch and Mrs. Longden came out to meet them. Dan jumped out to open the door for Peter, and the twins and Macbeth scrambled out after her. Mrs. Longden greeted Peter charmingly.

"You're Peter, and I can't tell you how pleased I am to welcome you. I can do with somebody here who is keen on horses... Yes, Dan, the others arrived twenty minutes ago and are upstairs exploring their rooms. Why don't you stay and eat with us as this is a reunion? Telephone Mrs. Sturt. Or I'll speak to her if you like."

Dan shook his head.

"Nice of you, but I must get back now. Thanks all the same... These are the other two Mortons. You will notice that they're twins. Things happen to them. I shall keep in touch if only in the hope of getting a story, and I'm working on the idea of a special TV interview now you've got some ponies

and this crowd of youngsters round you. I must warn you that Richard and Mary nearly always bring trouble or excitement or something unusual wherever they go."

The twins were not amused. As Mary stooped to pick up Macbeth, who was bristling at the sight of one of the King's Holt cats - he was bad-mannered about cats - the Colonel came out to join his wife and heard Dickie's outspoken reply to Dan.

"We think you are non-amusing again, Dan. We don't bring trouble to people we like, but by some of the things you've been saying to Peter about the sort of jobs you do, you always seem to be looking for it. If you had been with us this morning you would have seen two brave men shot by a bullying thief. If the policeman is dead we shall have seen a murder and we don't like it..."

Mary took up the tale.

"And please Mrs. Longden, we should like to telephone our mother in London and see if she's all right and whether the policeman is alive."

A long silence greeted these speeches and then Peter turned to Mary in shocked surprise. "Mary! Why didn't you tell us?"

"You and Dan were too busy to listen," Dickie said accusingly. "Anyway we didn't want to talk about it. Not until we were all together anyway. Let's find David and the others."

4. Lone Pine Council

Two hours later the Lone Piners were finishing what Dickie described as a fabulous banquet in the new dining-room at King's Holt. It was a good meal served by Chryssi, the pretty Cypriot girl, who seemed to be more interested in David and Tom than the girls, and asked them personal questions about their homes and where they lived. At last, when she brought them coffee she said, "And now I say 'Good night'... It is good to have you come here when everything is quiet and nothing much happens except some old people come to buy the ponies of wood."

She looked firmly at Tom during this speech and when she had closed the door David grinned at him.

"You'd better come down early tomorrow and have breakfast before we do. Chryssi is longing for another talk with you, Tom!... I wish Mother would ring again. She was waiting to hear from the police."

"You want to know about the wounded policeman, don't you?" Peter said. "Of course you do. When you've spoken to her I must telephone my father at Witchend, and I suppose Tom and Jenny will want to do the same. Then I suggest we all go up on the Moor before bed... Look out, Tom! Here's your other girl friend!"

It was Chryssi again but this time David was the target.

"Telephone for you, Daveed. From London. Now I say 'Good night' again and see you all in the morning."

Mary followed her brother out of the room and none of the others had much to say until they returned a few minutes later smiling broadly.

"Mum sends her love to all," Mary announced, "and the hospital says our policeman is out of danger. We've told Mrs. Longden and she says she wants to talk to us 'cos she's got two surprises... here she is."

Mrs. Longden smiled at Dickie as he got up.

"I'm so glad for the Mortons," she said. "This was a terrible experience for you and your mother. You twins specially must try to forget it now and I do hope that for Mrs. Morton's sake she didn't see the gunman's face."

"Why for my mother's sake specially?" David asked.

"I was thinking how horrible it would be for her - or indeed for any of you, if the man is caught and you had to appear in Court as a witness. That would be a very nasty experience. Would any of you know him again? I suppose not?"

"I can't forget his horrible crouching shape and the gun in his hand," Dickie said. "David didn't know but I knelt up for a second and tried to see what was happening."

"But not his face," Mary added. "I didn't see anything until the car rushed past us. Then I saw him with the gun. But not his face. That was all blurred and covered with a nylon stocking like the other two men. Please don't ask us any more questions about it."

"I won't," Mrs. Longden promised. "Now I came to tell you about two surprises. Are you ready to come upstairs or do you others want to telephone first?"

Peter nodded, got up and thanked her.

"What about you, Jenny? And Tom? Do you want to speak to Ingles?"

"I'm tired, Jen. You have a word for me. You're better on the telephone than I am except that you take longer to have a chat. Tell them I'm fine and eating off silver and gold. Give them all the best, Jen, and say you're being a good girl!"

Mrs. Longden sat down in Peter's chair and was very friendly. It was not surprising that the twins had little to say because they were both stifling yawns. David, who was also tired, was polite because he realized that she was genuinely trying to be pleasant and interested in what they all did and curious about their friendship with the Warrenders and with each other. He

was also relieved that she was not too horsey! She obviously liked chatterbox Jenny who never minded what she said to anybody, but it was equally clear that she could not make much of Tom who seemed unimpressed by her charm.

When the conversation lagged, Dickie picked up from the table one of the Dartmoor ponies which was used as a holder for the menu.

"Dan Sturt told us that the Colonel made them himself. He said he carved them. Will he show us how he does it? We think they're super."

"I'm sure he'll be pleased to show you tomorrow, Dickie. He loves working in wood and now spends all his time in his workshop. When we open officially he won't have the leisure for his hobby, and that's why he's working so hard now to set by a large stock. He started on these ponies just for fun but it's becoming quite a business. We're thinking of giving one to every guest when they leave and hope they'll tell *their* friends about King's Holt. You'll soon see that lots of nice people already call in and ask for them. I'll mention your interest to him - he's working now - but do please remember that he doesn't like to be disturbed if he has a customer with him... Now here are the girls looking pleased with themselves so I'd like to come up to your rooms and show you my surprises."

The Mortons and Peter, who remembered the old house, were amazed at the skilful way in which it had been modernized, while Tom and Jenny tried not to show how impressed they were when shown their rooms.

Their bedrooms were all along one corridor in one of the two wings at the back of the house. A double for Peter and Jenny with a dressing room off it for Mary and the same for the boys on the opposite side of the corridor. There were also two bathrooms and a room which Dickie, on a tour of exploration on arrival, declared to be locked. "Like Bluebeard" he remarked with relish.

Mrs. Longden now led the way down their private corridor, unlocked the closed room and handed the key to David.

"This is my first surprise. This room is for your use. When we really get going here we hope to get parties of pony-trekkers or even groups of friends from riding schools who will like being together. So that is why, with Mr. Warrender, we planned to have a sitting room with each group of bedrooms. I think they are fun and we hope you will too. There should be most things here which you can want. Come and see."

The room, which was at the end of the wing, was dominated by a huge picture window overlooking the ponies' paddock at the edge of the Moor which rolled away towards the distant Tors. There was a TV, a record player with a rack of discs, bookshelves gay with paperbacks and on the walls a large-scale map of Dartmoor, and some old-fashioned posters featuring horses. There was also a big coloured Riding Chart showing, with descriptions and pictures, most breeds of ponies and horses with notes for beginners and illustrations of equipment and tack.

Dickie ran to the window and gave a whistle of surprised delight. "Thank you very much for everything. It's marvellous. I shall be able to see most of Dartmoor from here with my telescope."

Mrs. Longden smiled and turned to Peter.

"We've only three ponies at present - a bay, a black and a brown. They need exercise and any of you may ride them. You may take out packed lunches when you like - just ask Chryssi at breakfast, or her father, Marios, who helps us in all sorts of ways. These Cypriots are wonderful and we shall have more to help us next year, but come to Bill or me - and do please call me Marjorie as do all my friends - if we can do anything to help you enjoy yourselves. And don't be surprised if you see a few odd strangers about. They will have come to see Bill... Here's my other surprise. A letter addressed to David which I was told by Mr. Warrender to pass over as soon as you were all settled in... Good night. It's fun to have you here."

She got up with a bright smile, gave Dickie a vague pat and drifted from the room.

Tom spoke first after a long silence.

"What do you know? True that I had a bash on the head and they all say I'm O.K. now, but I'm wondering what we're all doing in this posh place. And did you hear what she said, Jen? 'Call me Marjorie,' she said. I don't reckon I'll be doing that just yet."

"But she's nice, Tom," Jenny answered. "Really she is. I don't think any of us have ever been in a place quite like this, but wouldn't it be a good idea if David read us Mr. Warrender's letter and then we can have a Lone Pine meeting and talk about everything - if we don't all fall asleep."

David slit the envelope, but before he could begin to read Dickie turned from the window where he was watching night fall over the Moor.

"Yes, David, read the letter, but it's not so much what we're all doing here but what we're going to do tomorrow that's important. We all know that it's because of Penny and Jon that we're here, but Mary and me feel very peculiar about it. That banquet we just had was like eating in a sort of cemetery, if you know what I mean. We liked King's Holt better in the old days - except for this super room, of course."

"That's right, twin. It smelled old and not so glossy, but read the letter, David."

Peter and Jenny sank into the cushions of the luxurious sofa, David sat on the arm, the twins on the window seat with Macbeth and Tom prowling restlessly about the room.

Dear Lone Piners,

I've never met Tom and Jenny, but I'm sure you are both as nice as those I do know. By the time you read this I shall be in France with Jon and Penny, but this letter is to send you my best wishes for a happy holiday. Those of you who have been to King's Holt before may not like the new one quite as much, and I must tell you now that I have not seen the finished work on the stables, garages and workshop. It was Penny's idea to ask you, but I must explain that Colonel and Mrs. Longden are, in a way, partners of mine in this venture and most of the planning and alterations are their idea and have been carried out under their supervision. Both are in favour of this

trial visit of yours, and when we come back I shall be interested to hear how you have got on, and whether Peter has any ideas about the facilities for riding. I know next to nothing about horses, but I'm convinced that the new King's Holt is a good and useful idea and that if we are patient, will be well worthwhile. I'm glad the twins are with you. Please tell them that we thought of providing them with bicycles, but I'm told that the main road is very dangerous for cyclists at this time of year. Penny has also reminded me that they never go anywhere without Macbeth, and that he is getting too dignified to ride in a cycle basket.

So have a good time. Jon's mother at the Dolphin has some addresses in France where we can be reached. My wife sends her love to you all and so do I.

Yours affectionately,

George Warrender.

"That's a lovely welcome," Peter said as David folded the letter. "In a day or two I think we should write them a joint letter to tell them how we're getting on. Has anyone any ideas for tomorrow or shall we wait until tomorrow comes?"

Rather to her surprise, she realized that this was not a successful meeting. Nobody was quite at ease nor had anything much to say, and it was obvious that the new King's Holt was not what any of them had expected. The twins were exhausted; Tom and Jenny were only interested in themselves, but this was understandable because neither of them had ever experienced anything like this before. Tom, indeed, was quieter than ever and twice did not even answer Jenny when she spoke to him.

Peter tried to take control. She jumped up, held out her hands to Jenny and pulled her to her feet.

"Cheer up, Jenny. This is the first time for years that you haven't had anything to say at a Lone Pine Council. I think we should be ashamed of ourselves moping about like this when so much has been done for us. Trouble is that we're all tired out, and I'm not surprised that David and the

twins seem a bit dim after what they went through this morning. We'll all feel different tomorrow, and if we can't think of anything to do together we'll split up and explore. And Jen, if you and Tom want some bright lights and shops, we'll ring up Dan and ask him to give you a lift into Plymouth. Bed for you, twins. We'll take Mackie out for his walk and I'll bring him back to you, Mary, when I come to bed. O.K.? Shall I come and help you with the rest of your unpacking?"

Mary nodded her thanks and Dickie smiled sheepishly. At the door he turned and said, "Good night all. Sorry we're a bit weary, Peter. Orders to David and Tom. No row when they come to bed."

Peter went off with Mary, and David said, "Stop prowling about and giving us the fidgets, Tom. Bring Jenny and I'll take you two up on the Moor with Mackie, and Peter will join us presently. We'll all sleep better for some fresh air."

Tom looked startled but in spite of Jenny's pleading shook his head.

"Sorry, David. I've had enough for today and I'm going to bed. You go if you like, Jen."

But she would not go without him, so David called to Peter that he would wait for her in the hall, whistled to Macbeth, clipped on his lead and went to the top of the main staircase. It was now nearly ten o'clock, and he was wondering whether he should try to find Mrs. Longden and explain that two of them were going out for about half an hour when he heard her voice in the hall below.

"I tell you that he has just telephoned from Brixham, Marios, and he is on his way now. Of course I said we can put him up. Will you ask Kina to get No. 3 ready? I'll tell Bill and we'll wait up for him although he can't be more than half an hour."

David could not hear the porter's reply, but as they turned the corner of the big staircase Mackie barked and the couple in the hall looked up in surprise. Then Marios nodded to Mrs. Longden and went out by the service door.

When David explained that Peter and he were going out for a walk, Mrs. Longden was as friendly and charming as usual.

"Of course the front door will be open for you and there's a torch on the hall table you can borrow... We've got a visitor coming later tonight. Most unusual to come at this hour but somebody has just told this gentleman about the new King's Holt and Bill's carving. It's extraordinary how news of us is getting round and we can't turn business away... If you're going out you might tell Bill, will you? He's still in his workshop and although we've got a bell here which we ring when he's urgently wanted, he's probably engrossed in his carving... Go and rout him out for me. I'll tell Peter where you are when she comes down."

During the drive from Exeter, David had sat in front with the Colonel and found him interesting and friendly. He had asked no personal questions and talked only about the Moor and what they hoped to do at King's Holt. He also spoke warmly of the Warrenders and of how much he had enjoyed meeting them in Rye.

The moon was up as David strolled round the side of the house into the big yard. Like Dan, he was surprised at the alterations which had been made to make room for a row of modern garages with stables opposite. There were lights in the windows of the workshop and the Colonel opened the door at once to David's knock.

"Hello, David! I wasn't expecting to see any callers at this hour but I'm pleased to see you. Any news for me? I was just coming over to the house."

David gave him the message and then looked round curiously. On each side of the door under the windows was a workbench. He noticed two small lathes, a vice, and on each of the side walls were racks to hold the craftsman's tools. There were stacks of blocks of sweet-smelling wood ready for treatment and the floor was thick with shavings. The wall behind the benches was lined with shelves on which were stored hundreds of the Dartmoor ponies ready for sale.

"I'll show you round tomorrow, David," the Colonel said as he took off his white apron. "I know I'm spending too much time on these ponies but I'm

sure they'll help King's Holt eventually. They're being talked about already. I haven't time to finish them off with polishing but there's a chap in Brixham who helps with that. I'm also working on something new, but I'd better go in now and make my peace with Marjorie and welcome this chap who's coming tonight... Here's your friend Petronella. The front door will be open for you and don't get lost - but of course you've been here before... Good night to you both if I don't see you again."

They waited until he had locked the workshop door and then, hand in hand, walked in the shadow of the big house up the track that led on up to the Moor. They walked close together in companionable silence into the moonlight, stopping at the gate of the paddock of rough pasture to watch the three ponies of King's Holt in the distance.

"I'll see them tomorrow," Peter whispered. "Let's go on, David, it's such a perfect night and I've hardly seen you yet."

His arm went round her waist and she knew he was smiling as he said, "Not altogether my fault."

"I'm sorry you were annoyed when I went in Dan's car at Exeter. It seemed rather difficult to say 'No'. Am I forgiven?"

He lifted her chin and kissed her.

"You'd have been even more annoyed if I hadn't been annoyed! Now let's forget it. I'm beginning to enjoy this holiday... Let's take Mackie to the top of the hill where we can see the road... There's something to remember about Dartmoor, isn't there?"

"We mustn't be too long, David. Mary is still upset about what she saw this morning and was awake when I left her. She wants Mackie. Dickie was asleep. Your twins are very brave. They always were and that horrible business wasn't much fun for you either - I'm a coward about violence, David. I wouldn't have gone with Dan if I'd known what had happened to you. Dickie and Mary just sat in the back of the Mini and didn't even tell us what they'd seen... On a night like this violence doesn't seem possible, does it?"

They were now nearly at the top of the little hill. There was no sound but the tinkling of the river below them and Mackie's excited snuffling. The air was fresh and cool and faintly fragrant of heather, while above the immensity of the Moor, the purple sky was pierced by a myriad of stars. To the south was the lonely silhouette of Fox Tor and when they turned round they could see below them in the valley the moving lights of a few cars on the Ashburton-Tavistock road.

They sat in the heather for a few minutes and David told her how impressed he was with the Colonel's workshop and how much he liked him.

"I like Marjorie too but she does rather go on," Peter smiled. "I think we shall settle down here, David, but I am worried about Tom and Jenny. He's not really fit I'm sure, and Jen fusses him too much. It would be a good idea if you and Tom had a day out on your own. Jenny is super but she has got rather a one-track mind about Tom and she's not as happy as she should be... Although I'd rather stay here with you I think we should go back now. I promised Jenny and Mary that I wouldn't be long."

"Silly sort of promise to make on a night like this," David said as he helped her up. "Come on, Mackie. You've had quite a day too."

They were passing the paddock when the silence was broken by the imperative hoot of a car and they saw the headlights turning into the drive.

"There's our late visitor. Did Marjorie tell you a chap was on his way here from Brixham?"

"She said they were getting a room ready for a late visitor. But why Brixham, David? Seems a longish way to come at this time of night, but perhaps he's an old friend."

"Don't think so. I overheard Marjorie telling Marios and she seemed a bit fussed. I expect we shall find he's a benevolent old gentleman with a craze for original wood carvings."

"Not a good guess," Peter laughed as they walked down into the yard. "Look at that car!"

The lights in the yard had been switched on, and the big, opulent Jaguar which Marios was backing into one of the garages did not suggest an elderly, eccentric owner-driver.

As they walked into the hall the Longdens were welcoming their new guest. Marjorie saw them first and interrupted the two men with a cheerful "Good night to you both. Breakfast when you like in the morning, but please all come down together."

The newcomer turned in surprise. He was about forty, well-dressed, well-groomed and certainly very self-assured. Much more likely to be a successful businessman than a cultured collector of works of art. He looked the two young people up and down, but then his expression changed and there was no mistaking the appraising look he gave Peter as he took the cigar from his mouth.

"Good evening. Lovely night for a pretty girl to be out in the moonlight on the Moor."

Macbeth growled and partly to hide her confusion and annoyance Peter stooped and picked him up.

David took her arm and said a perfunctory "Good night". At the turn of the stairs they heard the man say, "Well! Well! What a surprise!"

5. Three Expeditions

When Peter woke next morning her first thoughts were of David, and of how he had comforted her after the unpleasant incident last night with King's Holt's latest visitor. Then she remembered the unhappy scene with Jenny who had been sitting up in bed waiting for her when she had come in quietly with Macbeth.

While she was undressing, Jenny in a dramatic whisper had told her that Tom had lost his memory again and could remember nothing about their journey by train from Birmingham to Exeter.

"It might happen again, Peter," she had sobbed. "Can't you understand that he might even forget me?"

Peter had done her best to help her, although she was well aware that Jenny was dramatising her own feelings rather than putting Tom first. She knew Jenny well. She had been her first friend when Jenny had been lonely and miserable about her new stepmother. So Peter had reminded her that the doctors would not have allowed Tom to come away on this holiday if there was anything seriously wrong with him. This seemed to reassure Jenny, who snuggled down and promptly went to sleep.

She was still sleeping as Peter raised herself on her elbow and looked at her friend with her lovely red hair spread on her pillow and a faint smile on her sensitive lips.

I hate her to be hurt, Peter thought, and then the door of the dressing-room opened quietly and Mary came in with Mackie under one arm. This roused Jenny who complained that they were sharing secrets without her.

As Mary settled herself on the end of her bed, Peter admitted that she had something to tell them.

"I didn't tell you last night because you were asleep, Mary, and you Jenny were too upset about Tom... No, Mary. Jen was worried because Tom is

forgetting things again but I'm sure he'll be all right today. If he forgets we mustn't ask him to remember."

She then told them about the stranger in the Jaguar, and tried to explain, without much success, why he had upset her and David.

"But is he sinister?" Mary said. "You said he was rude; well, some sorts of people always are, but is he sinister too? It's men like this who often start us off on an adventure and I must tell Dickie about him before we meet him... Anyway what are we going to do today? I think Mackie would like quite a long walkies and p'raps a splash in one of the streams. Let's get dressed now and all go down to breakfast together."

On their way downstairs, Dickie invented the name "Jagman" for the stranger they had not yet seen and Mary had difficulty in stifling her giggles as they walked primly into the dining-room behind the others.

Actually Jagman, who was just finishing his breakfast at the next table, was not particularly sinister. He nodded to David and Peter and looked curiously at Tom and Jenny. When the twins stopped in front of him and wished him "Good morning," he lifted his coffee cup, raised his eyebrows and said, "Same to you, funnies," which annoyed them, particularly as they knew they had asked for this sort of treatment.

After Chryssi had taken their orders, Jagman sat back and addressed them.

"Mrs. Longden tells me you're all here for a week or two. Hope you have a good time. Don't get lost or fall in a bog. Keen on riding, Blondie? Fine riding country, this. What about Redhead?"

Tom, in good form this morning, turned quickly.

"Thanks for the good wishes, Mister. I'll bet Mrs. Longden didn't tell you our friends' names were Blondie and Redhead. They don't answer to them."

Jagman laughed. "No offence! I'm just on my way, but I like to meet kids keen on horses and riding... See these carved Dartmoor ponies? Clever

work, and I'm going to buy a couple of dozen now as Christmas presents. Tell your pals about them."

This was Mary's chance.

"What a kind and generous man, twin. Are we not lucky to be breakfasting at the very next table to him?"

"Fortunate indeed," Dickie agreed fervently. "And so clever at guessing our names - or making up new ones like 'Funnies'."

"Must you really leave us so soon?" Mary pleaded. "You don't know us yet but we were longing to see more of you, Mr. - but you didn't tell us your name."

"Too right," Jagman said as he got up. "And if you two belonged to me you wouldn't be able to sit down for a week... All the same I like you lot. Where do you come from, son?"

"His name is Thomas," Jenny said coldly. "And we both come from Shropshire. May we all guess where you come from, sir?"

"Why not?" Tom said quickly. "I'll have first go. He comes from London. I was born in London and I know."

Jagman actually flushed with annoyance, but before he could answer, David laughed.

"Good for you, Tom. I'm sure you're right. Your Jag has a London registration, sir. I noticed last night when Marios was putting it away. I'm a Londoner too."

Jagman turned to Chryssi.

"Find the Colonel for me, my dear. I'd like to see him in his workshop. Tell him I want a couple of dozen of his Dartmoor ponies."

The Lone Piners grinned as he stalked out of the room and Chryssi flashed a smile at them from the service door.

"Extraordinary man," David remarked. "Now what to do today? Peter suggests three separate expeditions. Shall we ask for three packed lunches?"

"I never mind that sort of meal," Dickie said. "It can be a sort of extra. I don't think I shall need anything at about eleven today, but what makes David think that we all want to go off in pairs? And who goes with whom? Guess who goes with David, twin?"

"Perhaps we'll let you come with one of us seniors tomorrow, Richard," Peter said quickly. "You'll be useful for carrying the lunch and we'd try not to tire you out."

"Traitor!" Mary hissed at her. "That's what you are, Peter. You four can do what you like and go where you like and that reminds me of another vital thing. Not one of you except bullyboy David has asked, since we came down, about Mackie. My big brave brother forced me just now to keep him shut up in our room when he might have sat under the table with us in *uttah* peace and quiet-----"

"Chewing the cud, I suppose," Tom interrupted, as he took his transistor radio from his pocket. "Time for the News now."

The twins got up, and Dickie put his fingers to his nose with a gesture that suggested that the others were distasteful in every way. Mary was coldly polite.

"Excuse us, if you please. We will make our own plans for the day, but now we must look after our dog which-----"

"Who, twin," Dickie corrected her.

"Which or who as the case may be, we have been forced to desert because of David's *uttah* brutality. It will serve you all right if you have to pay for mending the furniture which our brave dog has savaged in his prison. If you're not careful you will have a mad dog-----"

It was then that Tom switched on the radio, and although Mary was interrupted in full spate, they were all silent as they heard the newsreader

announce that the Police Constable who was shot twice at the hold-up robbery at a jeweller's shop in north-west London yesterday was out of danger.

"The van driver who was wounded in the hand when trying to prevent the escape of the three bandits in their car is helping the police. The elderly proprietor, Mr. Simon Jacobs, who was brutally attacked is still in hospital and has made a helpful statement..."

As the News gave way to the Weatherman, the twins left the room without speaking.

"Good news that we shan't have to be witnesses in a murder case. I was worried about my mother who was driving the car," David said. "I wonder if they'll get those bandits?... O.K. then. Will one of you please ask Chryssi for six packed lunches while Peter and I go and change... And don't snigger, Tom. I know I shall be stiff tomorrow after riding one of the nags."

Half an hour later, David and Peter were waiting outside the stables for Mrs. Longden. They noticed that Jagman's Jag was now parked outside the workshop but the men must have been conducting their business behind closed doors.

"I'll be interested to see how he makes these ponies," David remarked. "Seems to be rather a song and dance about them... Here's Marjorie. Must remind her that the Colonel has promised to show us round sometime."

Mrs. Longden was looking harassed and overheard his last remark.

"Plenty of time for that, David, but you mustn't bother him now. He's got a splendid order this morning and we mustn't disturb him... Take two halters and fetch Blackie and Brownie from the paddock. I'll get the tack ready."

David always admired Peter's skill with horses and it was not long before they were leading the two ponies down to the stables to be saddled. They were in time to see Jagman coming out of the workshop carrying what seemed to be a very heavy suitcase. The Colonel followed and opened the

boot of the car for him with Mrs. Longden in smiling attendance, and they exchanged a few words as the luggage was lifted in and the boot locked.

Then Jagman looked up and saw them with the ponies. "On my way now," he called cheerfully. "Sorry I can't come riding with you this morning."

"Have a good journey to London," David replied. "You've got a good supply of ponies in there. Are they made of solid gold?"

The Colonel looked sharply at David as if he resented this pleasantry and said something to his wife that they could not hear. Mrs. Longden nodded, shook hands with Jagman and came over to them.

"I'll help you now, Peter. It's time you were on your way too."

David stood by as the ponies were saddled, and realized that Peter was twice as quick as Marjorie who seemed to be more interested in where they were going and when they would be back.

"We haven't really decided yet, Marjorie. Up the Swincombe river perhaps to the old Secret Station. Or up to Foxtor Mires. We've been here before you know, so don't worry about us. It doesn't really matter when we get back, does it?"

"Not really. Bill and I might go to Plymouth later and we'd like to be here when you get back. We don't want all six of you to feel you've been deserted. But you must feel free to do what you like. I suppose the twins will be all right on their own?"

"You can trust them, they really can be quite sensible," David said. "The house won't be empty, will it? Some of the staff will be here?"

Marjorie nodded. "Yes, of course. Only don't worry if you want to make a day of it. Goodbye. Have a good time."

A few minutes later when they had ridden out of earshot, David smiled ruefully.

"You're thinking I was rude to that Jagman chap, aren't you? I suppose I was. Don't quite know why but I don't care for him. Too patronizing and he did seem to make rather a fuss about a dozen or so wood carvings. There must be something special about Longden's work and I wonder how much Mr. Warrender gets out of his sideline... Sorry, Peter. Let's forget it and talk about us. Specially how much you've missed me."

She did not seem to mind telling him that, and the time passed quickly as they splashed through the rushing waters of the West Dart and then turned up the valley of the Swincombe. The Moor glowed with the purple of heather and the gold of the turning bracken and they were in no hurry. They stopped for the ponies to drink from a pool into which the stream tumbled.

"Let's go up to the Secret Station," David suggested. "We've never been right up to it and I'd like to see what it's like."

Peter was looking up at a hovering kestrel.

"I don't mind, David. I'm so happy that I can't explain it. I love high places and I love running water because both remind me of home. This is all bigger and more frightening than our hills and streams... I like these ponies too."

"What about me?"

"Oh, you David! You're fishing for compliments. You're part of the scenery. Let's get on now."

An hour later they skirted the treacherous green bog and rode across a clitter of loose stones to the deserted building which had been the temporary home of a group of scientists working on prototypes of flying saucers. They tethered their ponies before looking around. But there was not much to see. The concrete walls were weather scarred but still intact. Some of the small, barred windows which were above ground floor level had been smashed by stone throwers, but a great steel door looked as if it would last a century. There was no way of climbing up to the flat roof once used by the helicopters. Then as if to match their mood of anticlimax the

weather changed. A chill and wicked little wind which made Peter shiver sighed round the hideous ruins.

David was standing a few paces away and did not turn round until she put her hand on his arm. He was looking south over the immensity of the Moor and they stood, without words, awed by what they could see. It was a lonely world of tough, tussocky grass and sedges; of black menacing bogs hidden beneath deceptive green carpets of weed and rocky outcrops. And always against the skyline were the great granite masses of the tors all weathered into curious shapes by the storms and frosts and sun of centuries.

"Worth the trek up here I suppose," David said. "I don't like the look of the weather. Sun's disappeared and it's getting misty."

They turned back and had their lunch in the centre of a ravine with the stream tumbling over its rocky bed below them. David asked her about Tom and whether she thought his lapses of memory were serious.

"Not as serious as Jenny does, David. I'm more sorry for her in a way than I am for Tom who is tough. I think she behaves badly to her stepmother and I've told her so. I think of Jenny almost as a sister and there's so much I admire in her. They're a marvellous couple but I've just seen how she behaves when something happens to Tom... I asked my wise old father about this memory business. And do you know David, that I'm always being surprised at how much he knows. He said that all doctors know that concussion has sometimes most unexpected results and that it's difficult to be sure what might or might not happen. A shock or excitement might make Tom remember everything quite suddenly. After his accident it was some hours before he knew Jen, but he knew her before he recognized me or his uncle and aunt. I think he'll be O.K. if Jenny doesn't fuss him too much... Maybe we'd better start back now in case the mist comes down again. I wonder what the others are doing?"

Half an hour later, when they were well down the Swincombe the mist swept across the Moor again like a clammy grey blanket.

"We can't lose ourselves," David said. "Even if we can't see the path I expect the ponies will find their way home."

Peter agreed and led the way down the narrow track, but they had not gone far before she checked Blackie and as David pulled up behind her, said quietly, "Listen, David. I thought I heard somebody calling."

The brook was gurgling just below them and the only other sound was the clink of a pony's bridle. Then they heard, from somewhere ahead, the faint cry of a woman calling for help.

"Hello there!" Peter called. "Stay where you are until we call again. We're coming down by the brook," and she touched the pony with her heels and went forward.

After another hundred yards David shouted and to their surprise they heard from quite close a familiar voice.

"David! Is that you and Peter? This is Marjorie. I'm lost and the pony has bolted home."

They never discovered exactly what had happened, because when they did find her huddled by the stream she was nearly hysterical and not at all like the charming, cool-headed hostess of King's Holt.

"That stupid pony Silver Star shied at a tree and threw me when the fog came down. We shall have to sell him, Peter. He'll be no use here if we can't trust him. I suppose I fainted or something but he must have run home. Truth is I'm lost and when the fog came down I didn't know where I was."

They tried to calm her although she did not seem to be physically hurt. She admitted that she did not know the Moor well and Peter wondered whether she knew horses very well either.

"You'll be O.K. now anyway, Marjorie. We can't be more than two miles from King's Holt and we'll come with you. Perhaps you came too far by yourself? Weren't you going to Plymouth?"

"I did hope to go, but somebody else came to see Bill and he got tied up and didn't want to be interrupted, so I thought I'd come out on Silver Star and try to find you. I suppose I got muddled... I don't get out much these days

and I was disappointed not to have a day with Bill. I'm afraid I've been rather silly. Are you sure you know the way, Peter?"

She was obviously distressed, so David persuaded her to get up on Brownie while he walked beside her with a hand on the pony's bridle. Peter led the way at walking pace and it was not long before they were below the fog and in sight of the Dart and the main road.

Marjorie thanked them as soon as she realized where she was. "I'm grateful to you both, but if you'll excuse me I'll hurry ahead and see if everything is in order at King's Holt. Your twins may have come back and Bill might want me. No need for either of you to hurry," and with what David called her "hostess smile" she trotted ahead without a backward glance.

"Poor David!" Peter laughed as she slipped from her pony's back. "All three of us will walk. What an extraordinary woman! Anybody might think she didn't want us back too soon."

* * *

The twins' expedition did not take them far from King's Holt. From an upstairs window they had watched the scene in the yard when Jagman had put his luggage in the car and David and Peter had ridden off. Jagman did not seem in a hurry to go so Dickie suggested that they should hurry down the drive and see him off. They took Macbeth with them and waited at the entrance gate.

"He's a man I don't understand," Dickie admitted. "I suppose he's O.K. really, but he didn't take any notice of us at breakfast until he was exceedingly rude. Shall we do anything to him now?"

"We could close the gate and hide and watch him get out of the car and have to open it himself. I s'pose we could then write something rude on the boot of his car that he wouldn't see until somebody asked him what it meant."

Dickie looked at his twin with admiration.

"But that's terrific, Mary. Let's do that then." But before they could lift the hook which was holding the gate open there came the blast of a horn and Jagman was almost upon them. He was smoking a cigar and looked at them without interest as he drove on to the main road.

Neither of them spoke as they walked back to the house. The Colonel and Mrs. Longden, both looking pleased with themselves, were talking in the porch and waited for them.

"Hello," the former said. "How are you this morning and what are you going to do today?"

"Thank you sir," Dickie replied for them both. "We are in good health but are not sure exactly where we shall go except that we shall be exploring and taking our rations."

"And how is your carving work progressing?" Mary added with a sweet smile. "We are so looking forward to watching you at work. Mackie would like to see too. Perhaps you could do a carving of him?"

The Colonel's smile was forced as he turned to go indoors. "Perhaps I could, Mary. I'll think about it."

The twins were not very cheerful as they walked into the yard. They were still upset over yesterday's events, and could not forget that they had almost witnessed a murder, although neither wanted to discuss it. They were also very tired, and Mary was relieved when Dickie suggested that they should not go very far today.

"Why don't we establish a private Lone Pine camp of our own, Mary? Just us and Mackie. Chryssi has got food for us and maybe, if we're careful, we could have a camp fire?"

"So we could," Mary agreed. "And you can bring your telescope. Shall we go down by the river and paddle or up on the Moor by the ponies' paddock?"

Without much searching, Dickie found an ideal site. About a hundred yards along the path which led down to the Dart he noticed ruts in the heather leading up to what appeared to be a pile of loose rocks.

"Looks as if a big tractor pulled something heavy up here. Let's go and see."

The miniature mountain turned out to be a big dump of soil, stones and rubble which the builders must have moved from the yard with mechanical excavators. Dickie scrambled up to the top and realized that from this vantage point he could see into the stable yard and over the roof of the house to part of the drive and the main road.

On their way back to the house for the telescope and their rations, they agreed not to tell anybody of their plan.

"If the others are always going off on their own without us, we could do with a secret place of our own," Dickie remarked. "If they think that we're going to walk to the top of one of these tors, that won't hurt them will it?"

Mary agreed, and while her twin went up to find his telescope she went into the kitchen to collect their lunches. Chryssi asked where they were going and Mary said she would have to ask Macbeth because he was always consulted about their expeditions. Dickie was laughing when he joined her in the yard.

"Tom and Jenny have just gone off looking soppy. I've brought my pocket knife, a compass for knowing which way we're facing and some matches Jagman must have left. We'll call our camp Mount Morton, Mary."

Macbeth liked the new camp. The big pile of rubble was full of exciting possibilities and he began to dig vigorously before Dickie had established himself on the summit. They dug out a depression so that either of them could lie full length and use the telescope without being seen from the path. Dickie then hacked off some clumps of heather which he "planted" round his eyrie. From this viewpoint, which Mary was occasionally allowed to share, they could watch most of what went on in the stable yard.

Unfortunately the door of the Colonel's workshop was not visible, but the tradesmen's door to the kitchen was in range of the telescope. There was no

particular reason why Dickie should be curious about visitors to King's Holt, except that he was fascinated by what the telescope disclosed.

Nothing much happened until Mackie made his great discovery and began to yelp with excitement. Mary rushed to him and called Dickie who scrambled down in time to see her dig out of the rubble a tube container with a metal cap at each end. It was about two feet long and three inches in diameter but very battered and rusty.

They made much of Macbeth and rewarded him with a beef sandwich from the rations.

"Secret plans, o' course," Dickie said. "Must be very, very secret and valuable," but try as he would he could not force off the caps with his knife nor slit the metal. "We won't show the others, Mary. I'll ask Marios to lend me a hacksaw and we may have to hide this somewhere until I can make it give up its secret. I'll take it up with me now and see what's happening below."

During the next hour and a half, three different cars came into the yard. In each instance the visitor was a man and each stayed, presumably in the workshop with the Colonel, at least ten minutes. One of them took in a suitcase which was undoubtedly much heavier when he came out.

By this time the twins were both hungry and Mary was unpacking the rations when Dickie really did see something intriguing and gave her a running commentary.

"What d'you know, Mary? That other chap in the car has gone and now there's a small van but I can't read the lettering on the side. The driver is undoing the back. He's got a sort of apron on. It's a fish van, Mary, and he's taking out three of those smelly wooden boxes. He's straining like anything and he's got two in his arms. Now he's gone, but why hasn't he taken them to the kitchen? He's making a mistake and lugging them to the Colonel who won't be very pleased with him. Now he's come back for the other... Come up here, twin, and have a look. This is most peculiar."

He helped her up and passed her the precious telescope, but they had to wait for five agonising minutes before Mary squeaked, "Here's the fish man, Dickie. I can't see him properly. Now he's got in the van and off he goes... Why should the Colonel want to keep fish in his workshop?... Wait, Dickie! Here's Marios coming out of the back door and he's going to the workshop. P'raps the Colonel has sent for him to carry the fish boxes to the kitchen?"

But he had not. The twins waited for ten minutes before they saw the two men cross the yard - but not to the kitchen door.

"I'm a bit baffled, Mary," Dickie said as he closed the telescope. "If we eat now maybe I'll have a brainwave."

After their meal they dozed a little and when Dickie next went aloft he reported that he could see Mrs. Longden, in riding clothes, coming up to the paddock which they could not see. Sure enough she went down again soon after, leading the bay pony.

"She's going riding by herself," Mary whispered. "What a peculiar couple they are 'cos they never seem to do anything together. I s'pose she'll go down to the river?"

Ten minutes later Mary was proved right, and when Dickie turned the telescope towards the house he was surprised to see the Colonel's white estate car going down the drive.

"Must have been parked in front of the house, Mary. I wonder where he's going? He's turned to the left so that could mean Tavistock or Plymouth."

Soon after this the sun vanished as the mist crept down from the distant tors. They tried to light a camp fire without success and were just getting bored when they saw the riderless bay pony trotting up the hill from the river with trailing reins.

"That's her pony!" Mary gasped. "She must have had an accident. Shall we try to find her?"

"Better catch the pony first and put him in the stable and then tell Marios. She might be badly hurt and we couldn't carry her. And the fog may get worse... Come on, Mary." He picked up the telescope and they ran together down the hill towards the house.

The pony gave Dickie no trouble and while he was getting him into the stable Mary ran to the kitchen door. At first she could not make the fat Kina understand what had happened and that when a horse came back without a rider the latter had probably had an accident.

"So what shall we do? Will you ask Mr. Marios to come with us. We know the Colonel has gone out-----"

"Who says he go out?"

"We saw him go in his big car. Please hurry..."

Mumbling and muttering in her own language, the woman went off to fetch her husband and Mary had to tell her story again to Marios and Chryssi. Before she had finished, Dickie came back from the stable and insisted that somebody must come with them to look for Mrs. Longden. Marios seemed more concerned about how the twins knew the Colonel had gone out in his car, than he was about his mistress.

"I tell you we saw him!" Dickie shouted, flourishing his precious telescope. "We can see more than you think round here."

Silence greeted this outburst until Marios spoke in their own language and Chryssi grudgingly said, "My father say I am to come with you. Mrs. Longden she cannot be far away."

This seemed a silly arrangement. Marios himself was the obvious choice and it would be sensible to take the pony with them, but the man would not listen to their arguments and maintained that if neither the Colonel nor Mrs. Longden were in the house, he was in charge and would not leave it.

So the twins with Macbeth led Chryssi up the track to the Moor again. The Cypriot girl was obviously not keen to come, but she was curious about

where the twins had been and how they had seen the Colonel drive off.

"And what do you see through that thing, little boy?" she asked just as they reached the brow of the hill. "Perhaps you see the King's 'olt from here?" and she turned to look back. As she did so Mary, looking ahead down the valley saw a woman riding through the shallows of the river. The mist had nearly cleared now and she had no doubt that it was Marjorie Longden.

"There she is!" she shouted. "Look, Dickie! She's on the black pony David was riding this morning. But where are David and Peter?"

* * *

After David and Peter had left, and the twins were making their plans, Tom and Jenny were alone in the Lone Piners' sitting-room.

All through breakfast Jenny had been sure that Tom was better. He did not look so strained and laughed at the twins, and with Jagman he was certainly more like himself.

"I can't believe we're really here, Tom, and can do whatever we like all day. You are happy to be here now? With me, I mean?"

"I know what you mean, Jen, and the answer is yes, you comic little redhead. I reckon I'd like to take you to Plymouth. We could have a look at the shops and the sea and anything a bit cheerful that's going on. We both live in the country, Jen, so it makes a change for us to see a bit of life... And I like that dress you've got on and I've been wondering what lucky chap gave you those green beads."

Jenny stood on tiptoe to kiss him.

"Oh, Tom! It's the most wonderful thing in all the world when you talk to me like that. You know it was you who gave me these lovely beads and I shall wear them for ever... Yes, let's go to Plymouth. There might be a bus, and if not we must just walk. You never know but somebody might give us a lift... Get ready, Tom, and I'll go and ask Chryssi for our sandwiches."

"Something I must say to you, Jen," Tom said later as they swung along together on the road to Two Bridges. "I'm going to tell you this now and then we needn't talk about it again. You've got to stop worrying about me else I shall start worrying about you and that won't help either of us. I reckon I may still forget a few things for a while, but I don't forget you're my girl and I'm feeling better every day. So don't fuss me any more... O.K.?"

"O.K. Tom. I'll try... Look, a nice woman who just passed us in that red car is stopping for us."

So they got their lift and were lucky because their driver lived on the northern outskirts of Plymouth, and dropped them where they could get a bus which took them close to the City Centre. She was an enthusiastic Devonian, and told them about the wonderful new Plymouth which had been rebuilt after the war. She told them to go to the Hoe, down to the Barbican and round the little streets by Sutton Harbour and advised them to start by going up to the Roof Deck of the Civic Centre from where they could see the whole of the city and the sparkling waters of Plymouth Sound.

They did all these things. The sun shone and the sky was blue. They strolled up Armada Way and enjoyed the shops in Royal Parade. Tom bought ices at a smart cafe and told Jenny not to worry about anything they did today. And if they could not get a lift back to King's Holt from Tavistock, he would hire a taxi, because Uncle Alf had given him ten pounds' spending money for them both.

They ate their lunch on the sloping lawns of the Belvedere below the Hoe and lay dozing in the sun. After a little Tom slept and Jenny sat up with her hands clasped round her knees and watched over him, sure that she had never been so happy. When he woke and smiled at her and said he would like to see some boats, she said she would like that too. So they wandered over to the Barbican and found the Mayflower Stone and Steps from where the Pilgrim Fathers set sail for America, and then strolled through the narrow streets round Sutton Harbour. Tom had just pointed out that they were walking down a street called Rosemary Lane, when Jenny stopped suddenly and pointed to the car parked at the kerb twenty yards ahead.

"Look, Tom. That white estate car. See the number? I'm sure that's Colonel Longden's."

Tom hurried forward. She was right, although there was nobody in the car which was opposite a rather squalid fish shop. At the side was a cobbled alley leading into a yard and as Jenny joined him they saw the Colonel hurrying towards them. Behind him a man in a fishmonger's apron was carrying two heavy boxes of fish.

When later they discussed this extraordinary meeting, Tom and Jenny both agreed that the Colonel's first reaction when he recognized them was anger. He recovered quickly and forced a smile. "Hello, you two. How did you get here? Want a lift back to King's Holt?"

Then to the surly, sandy-haired man behind him, "Thanks, Charlie. Put the salmon in the back of the car for me, there's a good chap. These youngsters are staying with us at King's Holt. Ring us up when you get some more in. We always like to hear of a bargain."

Tom opened the back of the car for Charlie who did not bother to thank him, and then grinned at the Colonel.

"Thanks all the same, sir, but we're not going back yet. Extraordinary seeing you like this, but we're exploring Plymouth and we'd better be on our way. We're probably going to the flicks, but we'll be back in time for a fish supper... See you then."

Colonel Longden got into the driving seat, nodded to them and drove off. Charlie was already limping down the alley.

6. Not Quite What They Seem

After dinner that same evening, the Lone Piners went upstairs to their sitting-room to exchange views and swop stories of how they had spent the day. When they had closed the door and Mary had settled Macbeth on his travelling rug, Jenny walked over to the big window.

"I want to watch the night," she said. "I've had a super day. I've never had such a wonderful day and I don't want to see it go because I can never get it back again."

"Come and sit down with us," David laughed. "Just for a change come and sit next to me. You know you're talking like one of the romantic books you're so keen on, and as long as we've known each other you've been telling us that you've just had the most wonderful day of your life... We don't see why Tom should have you all the time. Come and sit on the arm of my chair and make a fuss of me before it's your turn to interrupt Tom when he tells us about your wonderful day."

"You're laughing at me," Jenny protested, but after giving Tom a radiant smile she did come to David and just for once she could not find the words to explain what the friendship and loyalty of the Lone Piners had meant, and still meant to her. Tom was special and forever, but even as these words came into her mind she realized that there was no reason why all the Lone Piners including the three who were not with them now - Jon, Penny and Harriet - should not be forever too. She looked up and saw Peter, who was sitting on the sofa with Mary, smiling at her steadily. She looked at Tom sitting on the floor leaning against Peter's knees and he winked at her. And there was Dickie, also on the floor, tickling Macbeth who rolled on his back in ecstasy. Jenny's eyes filled with tears of happiness.

David's hand closed over Jenny's as he asked Peter to tell the others about their expedition to the Secret Station. He had not much to add when she told them in what a peculiar state of mind Marjorie Longden had been when they had found her half-hysterical in the fog by the Swincombe.

"Peter doesn't think Marjorie knows much about horses, and is really an inexperienced rider," he said. "She certainly doesn't know as much as we do about the Moor, and I'm not sure that she was telling the truth when she said her pony had shied and thrown her. Didn't sound convincing, did it, Peter?"

"Not really, but what puzzles me is why she should want to come out at all to find us? She kept on fussing before we left by asking when we'd be back and then suggesting that we could be out all day if we liked. It could be true that she was disappointed that her husband didn't take her to Plymouth after all!"

"He went to Plymouth without her," Jenny said quickly. "We saw him. He offered us a lift back. Just wait till we tell you about that. He was collecting fish from a mouldy little shop and we had it just now to eat. I heard him say it was salmon."

Obviously this news created excited interest and Dickie deserted Mackie and jumped to his feet.

"But we saw a van bringing him some more fish. His workshop must stink of fish!"

David begged him not to talk out of turn or interrupt Peter again.

"There isn't much else to tell," she went on, "but come to think of it I don't believe we saw the Colonel's estate car in the yard when we were rubbing down the ponies after we got back, did we, David?"

"I can't remember, so we don't know when he got back. Peter forgot to tell you that we saw Jagman take his leave. He must be going to set up a business selling the Colonel's ponies, because he went off with about a hundredweight of them. I didn't like that chap and Peter says I was rude to him."

"We don't like him either," Dickie said. "We went to say 'Goodbye' to him at the gate and he was rude to us. We're glad he's gone."

"Back to London I suppose?" Tom spoke for the first time. "Too clever by half. Can't think what he was doing down here. Not the type, I should have thought, but I don't reckon to know much about this sort of place... Any more to tell us, Pete? Did she thank you for coming to her rescue?"

"I suppose so. David walked so that she could ride his pony home, and as soon as she saw where she was she hurried on ahead of us. Rather cool, we thought, and David believes she wanted to warn Bill that we were on the way. When we got back the twins told us how they had met her."

"She just said you two were on your way," Mary said, "and when I told her that Dickie had put her runaway pony in the stable and that we'd told Marios that she might have had an accident, she barely said 'Thank you' and seemed surprised to see Chryssi."

"Yes. That was a bit odd, too," Dickie added. "They sort of glanced at each other and didn't say much when Mrs. Longden told us we needn't hurry back and went ahead with Chryssi who wasn't wearing proper shoes for walking on the Moor. But she was different when she saw us before dinner. She thanked us then and made a silly fuss."

Jenny then told a breathless story of their hours in Plymouth, the theme of which was how wonderful Tom had been. She did not seem to have a very clear idea of the places they had seen, but admitted, under cross-examination from Dickie, that she had seen the sea and then proudly announced that she had been the one to recognize the Colonel's car first.

"There we were just strolling up that narrow old street down by the quay where there were lots of little boats-----"

"Rosemary Lane, it was called," Tom interrupted.

"That's right. So it was. Well, there we were, not going anywhere special and I saw it ahead and remembered the number which I've forgotten now but it doesn't matter and Tom said-----"

"Actually I was so surprised I hurried ahead and there was Longden just walking up an alley at the side of the smelly little shop. O.K. Jen. I'll finish

now because time's getting on... Point was, David, that although Longden was pleasant enough and offered us a lift back here, we were both sure that when he first saw us he was furious. Can't think why. No reason why he shouldn't buy salmon or whatever where he likes and when he likes. The character who sold it to him, and we suppose, owns the shop was unfriendly. His name is Charlie, he's sandy-haired and walks with a bit of a limp."

"Why didn't you let him bring you back?" Mary asked. "How did you get back anyway? Another lift?"

"It was much too early for us to come home," replied Jenny. "We'd hardly been there any time. We said we were going to the pictures but we didn't after all. If you really want to know, we went on a bus to a place called Yelverton and had some tea - with toast, actually - and then Tom brought me home in a taxi... Yes, he did. Don't all look so surprised. He thought I was a bit tired, and it was true I was spoiled-----"

"How lovely for you, Jenny," Peter said quickly, before she could give them any more confidences. "Now it's the twins' turn, isn't it, David?"

Between them, Dickie and Mary told a good story of how they had discovered a secret place and how with Dickie's telescope they had been able to spy on the Colonel's visitors, three of whom had almost certainly come to buy his ponies. The most intriguing item of news was the small van which they were sure delivered two cases of fish which were not taken into the kitchen but must have gone into the Colonel's workshop. They made the most of capturing a half-wild pony, but when it was Mary's turn she held her audience by her description of how she tried to make the three Cypriots understand that a riderless horse might well mean an injured rider.

"I don't really know how much English they understand," she explained, "but they didn't seem to care. Marios, who we think is a funny-peculiar sort of man, kept on asking how we knew that the Colonel had gone out. He must have known if he was left in charge. Why have we been here only one day and yet everybody seems to be behaving in not quite ordinary ways... Marios, Kina and Chryssi, for instance? They don't seem like servants we've

met in other hotels, but p'raps that's because we're the only people here. Dickie an' me think that though it isn't sinister yet, it might be quite soon."

David and Peter thought that they had so much to be grateful for here that they should not waste time being suspicious about things which did not concern them, but they did all agree that Marjorie Longden had behaved very oddly about apparently wanting them all out of King's Holt. The Colonel's obsession with fish was also peculiar, and if he had received some in a van why did he go out an hour later and fetch some more from Plymouth? And what puzzled them all was why so many people in so comparatively short a time should drop in to buy the carved ponies? Mary raised a shrewd point here.

"It's funny that the people Dickie saw this morning weren't families on holiday just having fun, but just men by themselves. That's what you said wasn't it, twin?"

"Yes. That's true," and then suddenly he jumped up and clapped his hand to his head and gasped, "I forgot it, Mary. We must have left it up there. I must go and fetch it now."

The others asked him what he was talking about but only Mary knew that he must have left behind his precious tube of secret documents. He refused to disclose his secret and Mary had just persuaded him to wait until tomorrow when the door was opened suddenly and Chryssi came in.

"The telephone," she announced. "It is for Peter Sterling and I do not know him. The man say he is a girl."

"Perhaps it's my father?" Peter said as she hurried out, followed more slowly by Chryssi, and it was Tom who summed up what most of them were thinking: "Fings ain't quite what they seem, are they?"

When Peter returned she was smiling.

"That was Dan Sturt. He says he'd like to come over and see us in the morning and perhaps one of us would go riding with him."

"And what did *you* say?" David asked.

"That I must ask *you*, first, David."

7. Lucky Girl

Next morning at 6.50 precisely, Dan Sturt was wakened by the telephone ringing at his bedside. His caller was a young Detective-Sergeant called Bob Hunter whom Dan had helped unofficially more than once. Although they did not often meet they were firm friends, largely because they knew they could trust each other. The Sergeant did not waste many words this morning.

"Sound as if you've just gone to bed, young Dan. Pull yourself together because today's your lucky day. Thought you'd like to know there's talk of a record catch coming in at Brixham this morning with the tide. Some of us here are going in to see it."

A nod was as good as a wink to Dan, and for once he was out of bed and in the bathroom before his mother. Bob was stationed at Plymouth but liable to turn up anywhere in Devon, and Dan was sure that he would not have troubled to telephone so early if there was not something special brewing. But what sort of a record catch was coming in on the tide in a Brixham trawler?

He told his mother about it while she was getting his breakfast and he was looking up the tide-table in the local paper.

"Ten o'clock, Mum. Brixham can't be more than thirty miles, but I'll get there soon as I can and have a look round. Come to think of it I might go Plymouth way which is much longer, and just drop in to the paper to see if they know what's cooking."

"Must be near twice as far that way, Dan, but you've plenty of time. Now mind you have a good breakfast. No good going out on a day's work with an empty stomach. Just relax for ten minutes and eat your bacon and eggs quiet and peaceful. I'll expect you when I see you later today. Take care on the roads."

She always said this and Dan never forgot. He was a good and careful driver.

It was a beautiful morning when he set out soon after eight. He knew every inch of the road to Plymouth and got to town in time to scribble a note to his News Editor at the office saying he might be on to something at Brixham and would telephone later.

And so through Ivybridge and Bittaford he came to Totnes, crossed the Dart and headed for Torbay. Ever since he had moved to Devon to help his mother with a new life Dan had been fascinated by Brixham, because although it was always packed with visitors in the season it still retained its individuality as a small fishing port. There really were genuine trawlers still working from here - many of them battered and shabby but strikingly colourful with bright red and blue sails. There were two harbours, an attractive busy quay, landing stages for the passenger boats and a fish market.

Dan left his Mini in a car park near the Bus Station and was interested to see a dark blue police van in one corner. The quay was only two minutes' walk away, and as he expected, there were plenty of people enjoying the sunshine and watching some fishermen mending their nets of scarlet nylon. A few fishing boats - all with "BM" classification, were swaying gently at their moorings as the incoming tide slapped their hulls. Overhead the greedy gulls squawked and mewed as they circled hopefully about some stacks of empty fish crates and lobster pots. There was not a uniformed police constable in sight.

Dan strolled the length of the quay and then went on to the pier. From here he saw the coloured sails of three trawlers coming in and by the activity on the quay guessed where they would moor to unload. On his way back he saw his friend Bob Hunter leaning against a kiosk which was selling candy floss. He was wearing a blue blazer and light coloured slacks and the sort of straw holiday hat pulled forward over his forehead that might have been bought at any one of the twenty shops catering for visitors in Brixham. He was not eating candy floss but reading a paper.

Dan had more sense than to speak to him and was not surprised when he glanced up as he passed and looked through him. So Dan wandered on, turned at the corner of the Strand and as the first of the trawlers rounded the end of the pier, joined the group of sightseers waiting to see the boats come in, stationing himself where he could keep an eye on Bob Hunter.

The detective folded the paper and put it in his pocket as the first trawler bumped gently against the fenders and one of the men threw up a rope to a mate ashore. Two Customs Officers in blue uniform appeared from somewhere and gave a cheery greeting to the three men aboard. Dan watched them idly and then noticed that they exchanged a glance with Sergeant Hunter who was watching the next trawler coming in. Suddenly Dan knew that this was what they were waiting for. The group of sightseers of which he was one seemed to be getting bigger. At his elbow was a big, hatless man who did not look like a tourist. Dan had seen his type before. He was sure he was a police officer. Another man had only just arrived and was speaking to Bob Hunter as he watched the trawler. Dan followed his glance and saw that she was named *Lucky Girl*. Then, as she bumped gently against the slimy wooden wall of the quay and one of the men threw up a rope, the two Customs Officers edged their way through the crowd and jumped aboard. The man in the wheelhouse came out on deck and shouted something abusive, and then Dan saw the police van pull up in front of the candy floss stall and a dozen uniformed constables swarmed out and began, firmly and politely, to move the crowd away from *Lucky Girl*.

"Sorry, sir. Excuse me, madam... A little trouble expected here so kindly move along... We wouldn't want any unpleasantness, would we...? Thank you, sir. Please don't push, miss..."

Dan wondered whether to show his Press Pass. He could not see exactly what was happening on the trawler, because Hunter and two of his men in plain clothes were standing on the edge of the quay, blocking his view. There was some confused shouting below and then the three detectives also jumped aboard so Dan decided to keep out of the way. Bob had paid him the compliment of giving him a hint, and he was sure that when he had done what had to be done he would tell him as much as he could.

So he gave the nearest constable a friendly grin and backed away with the rest of the crowd which, as usual, was seething with rumours.

"Absolutely disgraceful," an elderly lady protested as she trod on Dan's foot. "I can't think what this country is coming to. Interfering with the law-abiding public in this way is really most unreasonable. Why shouldn't we stand here in the sunshine?"

"Maybe the police are helping us all to be law-abiding," Dan suggested as he removed his foot. "And there is still some sunshine further up the quay... Excuse me, please. No, sir. So far as I know no baby has fallen overboard... No madam, I do not think fire has broken out..."

By now the police had cleared enough space for the blue van to drive in close to the *Lucky Girl*, and Dan was sure now that he was on to something big. The two Customs Officers obviously suspected smuggling and the fact that Bob was in the know suggested that Customs and police were working closely together. Somehow or other he must see who was taken into the van, and he hoped that he would be told presently what contraband had been found. He was puzzled about the situation because he knew that Devon fishermen were a very closely-knit fraternity, and although once this coast had been known to be a smugglers' paradise, it seemed likely that two or three men at this sort of game would soon be discovered by the rest of the fleet. He knew too that local fishing was on the decline and that not much money could be made from it in these days. But the rewards of smuggling were as high as the risks.

While thinking this out, he was edging round the back of the crowd so that he would be able to see who was taken into the van, and found himself next to two fishermen in their thick blue sweaters and high rubber boots. They were both taller than Dan and obviously had just come off one of the other trawlers. His first inclination was to question them, but he then realized that without deliberately eavesdropping he was overhearing some interesting information. The gist of this was that the three men on *Lucky Girl* were newcomers to the fleet and not popular with the other men. There was a suggestion that the captain was a Devon man who had been away for years in the Channel Islands and only recently bought the boat from a local man who had retired.

"Looks like he's in for real trouble now," one of them said. "Gives us all a bad name an' there'll be a dirty story told when truth comes out... Here they come now... Looks as if they've got half the County police here on the job..."

Dan strained to see what was happening but the operation was over very quickly. Three fishermen, with coats over their heads, were hustled by a police escort into the van which drove off quickly. The crowd drifted away leaving three policemen on the quay and the Customs men still aboard talking to Hunter and the other two detectives. Dan edged nearer and waited until the Sergeant looked up and recognized him. His smile suggested that he was to wait for him, and as Dan would not have dreamed of doing anything else, he strolled away and began to plan what he should do as soon as he got his story. Local radio he could do over the telephone and maybe he could get on TV News tonight. There would be time for the papers this afternoon but not much, and he hoped Bob would not be too long.

He wandered over to the candy floss man who was pleased to have the opportunity of grumbling to anybody who would listen. His complaint was that police activity upset trade and he seemed to think this more important than smuggling. Dan asked him whether he knew what had been happening and whether there was much smuggling along the Devon coast in these days? He leaned confidentially across the counter and as Dan inclined his head in the same direction he felt a firm hand on his shoulder.

"Enough of that sort of talk, young man," came a familiar voice. "We can't have conspiracy here. Kindly step along with me."

The candy-floss merchant was as astonished as Dan when he recognized the detective. Bob was looking very pleased with himself.

"You've behaved very well, young Dan," he said as he led him away. "I've got about ten minutes for you, and as I like to see who's my neighbour when I'm talking over a drink, we'll find a cafe where we can sit out of doors. What do you make of what came in with the tide?"

"Drugs, I suppose," Dan said. "And she wasn't a lucky girl, was she?"

"Not this time. I can't tell you who gave them away, but we're only at the beginning of a nasty story and the right kind of publicity may help us."

"I'll do my best," Dan smiled. "There's a cafe on the other side of the street and a phone box almost next door. That will suit me, Bob, and thanks a lot for giving me the tip. Is this big?"

"Biggest job of mine - ever," Bob said and stepped off the kerb without looking.

Dan grabbed his elbow and pulled him back so hard that the detective stumbled to his knees on the pavement just as a shabby old van accelerated past them, only a few inches from the kerb. As he stooped to help Bob to his feet Dan caught a glimpse of the driver. So surprised was he at the expression on the man's face that he forgot to look for the rear number plate.

"Sorry to be so rough, Bob," he said. "That chap was a maniac. Got a face like a cunning sandy fox. Are you a marked man?"

"What do you mean?"

"Only that if there were any witnesses they might have thought that chap was out to get you."

Hunter looked serious for a moment and then laughed. "Don't be so dramatic, Dan. You've been reading too many crime thrillers. I was to blame for not looking where I was going. Thanks for getting me out of the way."

They crossed the road in safety and sat at a table on the pavement. Bob ordered coffee and wasted no time.

"I'm telling you this, Dan, because I can trust you to use your discretion. As always the police need the co-operation of the public in this matter... No, Dan. Not drugs this time. You should know - you must know - that hardly a day passes in this country without evidence that well-organized, professional gangs of criminals are using firearms as they have never done

before. Sometimes it's hijacking, sometimes they are used by burglars if they're disturbed or if the police are after them, and it's commonplace today for three or four armed men to hold up a bank and to shoot either a copper, a member of the staff or even of the public who has the guts to interfere. Only two days ago three nasty types beat up an old jeweller in his shop near Paddington in London, smashed the window, tried to kill a copper who left the traffic to look after itself when the alarm was given-----"

"I heard about that," Dan interrupted. "I know two kids who saw it... I get the message, Bob. Do you want me to ask you where the crooks get their guns?"

"Yes. And I'll answer you. They are being smuggled into Britain and we've just got twenty nice new Lugers, each in its plastic bag and nicely packed in freshly caught fish and ice. I'm not going to tell you how we got on to these chaps but they are the first weak link in a long, strong chain. They weren't clever. They were not Brixham natives... But it's not only the smugglers we want. We are now sure that in different parts of the country there are 'secret arsenals' where smuggled firearms are stored for sale and hire to the professional crook. These are the chaps we want, and if we could find these key men, with the help of the Customs boys we'll have a good chance of checking the traffic. We don't want to give too much away but in your eye-witness story, I know you will tell your listeners and readers how you just happened to be strolling along the quay at Brixham enjoying your candy floss, when you stopped for a moment to see *Lucky Girl* come in. You will know what else to say but, at the moment, nothing about the secret arsenals, if you please. We want to surprise them."

"O.K., Bob. Thanks a lot. Just one question. Wouldn't your three chaps who are now helping the police with their enquiries have led you to the nearest arsenal?"

"You mean why warn any other smugglers that we're on to them?"

"No, I don't. Who's paying the chaps you've just taken?"

"Not the old spider sitting in the middle of his web, Dan. Not very likely that these chaps would go direct to him. There's probably a go-between."

Maybe several, all getting a rake-off. More likely the smugglers are only paid when they've delivered the goods to an agent of the spider. Sooner or later we shall find our way to the centre of a few webs... That's all for now. All you owe me is the price of a cup of coffee. Just behave yourself as we shall be listening to what you say... Good luck."

Before the detective had disappeared in crowds of shoppers, Dan had tossed some coins on the table and was in the telephone kiosk.

8. Lovely Fish!

On the same morning that Dan was wakened early and went to Brixham, Dickie also woke suddenly with the feeling that there was something he had to do. There was no sound from David or Tom in the next room, so he turned on his back and went through the exciting events of yesterday ending with the evening meeting of the Lone Piners in their sitting-room when he had almost fallen asleep.

Something to do with the camp he had established with Mary? Something secret and private - just to the two of them... Got it! He sat up triumphantly. The secret plans which he was sure must be hidden in that battered old metal tube found by Mackie! He remembered now that he had nearly given the game away at the meeting last night. He remembered, too, that he must have left the tube in the camp when they had hurried down to the house with Marjorie's pony. Funny, but Mary had not been very interested in the possibilities of these secret documents. She had been polite of course. They were nearly always polite to each other, but Dickie was beginning to realize that there were times now when they were not always interested in exactly the same things at the same time. They were still interested in people in the same way - and in Macbeth, of course - but if Mary could not see the importance of secret plans which had been buried for safety's sake, he must recover them by himself.

He got out of bed quietly and went to the window. There was a suspicion of mist over the Moor, and when he opened the window wider he could smell the heather. There was no sound either inside or outside the house. No traffic on the road. No whistling milkman like the cheerful friend he sometimes met early in Brownlow Square when he took Mackie for his walkies. London seemed like another world, and as he dressed he remembered the sound of those two shots in the narrow street; of the insistent warning siren of the police car and the glimpse of that awful masked face of the man who was nearly a murderer as it flashed by in the robber's car. As Dickie pulled his sweater over his head, he remembered how brave David had been, first in trying to protect their mother, and then in going into the street to see if he could help. He admired his brother but

was glad that he was still asleep when he crept through the big bedroom. Neither did Tom stir.

No sounds came from the girls' room as he passed, and as he went downstairs there was only the ticking of the grandfather clock in the hall, the hands of which pointed to three minutes to seven.

The front door was locked but the key was on the hall table and he managed with both hands to turn it. Then he realized that the door was also bolted. He was able to draw the bolt at the bottom but could not reach the other. The clock struck seven as he dragged a heavy chair up to the door and climbed on it. As he reached for the bolt, he nearly fell backwards with shock at the sound of a quiet voice behind him.

"Good morning, Richard. Perhaps I can help you?"

Dickie recovered quickly when he saw that the Colonel, wearing a blue polo-necked jersey and khaki slacks, was smiling up at him.

"Good morning to you, sir. Please open the door for me, I want to go for a walk."

"And very nice too. By yourself?" the Colonel said casually as he put the heavy chair back where it belonged before drawing the bolt and opening the door. Dickie wondered whether he was going to suggest coming with him which would mean that he would have to lead him away from the camp.

"Actually yes," he said. "I don't think my twin is awake yet. Sometimes I like early morning walks when I can't sleep. What do you do at this time in the morning, sir?"

"I couldn't sleep either, Dickie. I'm going to my workshop. Like to see it now?"

"Yes, I would, sir. Thank you very much. I must warn you that I'm not very good with my hands. Not handy I mean. I don't get on very well with my woodwork master at school. My father says it would be an overstatement to

say we're friends. All the same I would like to see where and how you make the ponies."

The Colonel was in a cheerful mood and obviously knew what interested curious, young boys. Dickie was fascinated by the rows of finished ponies, ranged neatly on the metal shelves behind the work benches and delighted when the Colonel allowed him to work one of the lathes, showing him how to change the shape of a block of wood. He also showed him two new rough models of ponies' heads on which he was working, and it was while Dickie was admiring these that Mary came running across the yard with Macbeth at her heels. The Colonel made a fuss of the dog and then asked Mary to lift him on to one of the benches.

"I like his head, Mary. He's a grand little chap. I wonder if I could carve it in wood? If you all stay here long enough I'll see what I can do."

There was no quicker way to Mary's heart than admiration for and understanding of Macbeth, so she graciously accepted this offer in a nice speech which was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone.

"That will be a business call for me, so you'll have to excuse me now," the Colonel explained. "We'll talk about this another time. Get yourselves an appetite for breakfast now, and be sure to tell Marjorie what you're all going to do today... Goodbye," and he quickly closed the door behind them before answering the telephone.

"That man is nice as well as clever," Mary said. "You didn't come down early just to see him, did you? You came to get your old secret plans... I woke early too and so did Mackie, and I remembered you getting in a state last night 'cos you'd left them up there, and I sort of knew you were awake so I got up as well. Peter and Jenny are still asleep."

Dickie was impressed. She had not even gone into his room to see if he had gone.

"O.K. then. Let's go. I can't remember exactly where I left those plans, but I want them. I remember taking my 'scope down with me when we caught the pony... Thanks for coming, Mary."

They were not long reaching the top of Mount Morton but at first sight there was no sign of the missing plans. Macbeth sniffed round excitedly, and Mary was sure that he knew that somebody else had been there.

"I think so too, twin. Remember we scooped out a sort of cave where Mackie found that tube and we thought we might light a fire there? That's fallen in now and it looks as if the mountain is a different shape. Perhaps somebody has been here and trampled all over it? Let's ask Mackie to do some more digging."

Macbeth needed little encouragement and suddenly Mary pounced on hidden treasure.

"Look, Dickie. It's an earring - jewels rich and rare without compare! It's almost new - not really ancient treasure. I don't suppose it's real gold or real rubies and I believe I've seen it before. This just proves somebody has been here since we left yesterday."

"Clever old you," Dickie said. "Stuff it in your pocket and soon as we've found my treasure I'll have a proper look at it."

In a frenzy Mackie helped him re-shape Mount Morton and their efforts were soon rewarded when Dickie hauled out the precious tube.

"Come and see, Mary. Sit down here and let's look at our treasures."

She showed him the earring first, which was commonplace, and Dickie agreed that it did not look as if it had been lost for long.

"Just proves that we're on the trail again, Mary. Somebody has been up here nosing about. We've been spied on."

"Just like us spying on other people," Mary said reasonably, but before he could answer, Mackie began to bark a furious warning and dashed round to the other side of the dump.

"Hide your treasure!" Dickie hissed. "Somebody coming," and he held the precious tube behind his back as they both stood up to see the intruder.

Their visitor was Chryssi. She was standing a few yards away and she was very angry as Macbeth pranced round her growling and snarling.

"Take him away!" she shouted. "I won't 'ave him. He is a danger. I tell Mrs. Longden."

"Come here, Mackie," Mary ordered. "Sit down and behave yourself. SIT... Good dog!"

Macbeth obeyed his mistress while she tried to explain that he was only guarding them because this was their special place, and now that he could see that Chryssi was their friend he would not be any more trouble.

"I s'pose you really are our friend?" Dickie asked. "If you are why have you come here? We've made this place private. We found it and made it and if you tell anybody you won't be our friend."

"Mackie will know too," Mary added. "And you wouldn't like him to be an enemy, would you, Chryssi? Why have you come? It can't be breakfast time and if it was you ought to be down there helping."

Chryssi approached with caution.

"You are silly, baby children," she said. "I go where I like."

"Then go where you like away from here," Dickie said. "And that will be where we like. You've been this way before, haven't you?"

"We know you have," Mary added. "I've remembered now. You came up here last night and lost an earring. Why did you come?"

Chryssi shrugged.

"I say I go where I like. I see you two babies up here yesterday looking at things with that-----" and she ringed her finger and thumb and held it to her eye.

"It's called a telescope," Dickie said. "If you'd only be decent to us we'll let you look through it one day. Give her the earring, Mary, and we'll walk

down with her. I s'pose you came now to look for it? Lucky we came first this morning and had Mackie to help us. You want to be more careful, Chryssi. You shouldn't let Mackie hear you call us babies. He won't like it."

Mary realized that her twin - who was not trying to hide his secret plans - had changed his mind because he knew that Chryssi had seen them here yesterday and come up after dusk, just out of curiosity, to find out what they had been watching. There was no sense now in quarrelling with her, so she handed over the earring and said Macbeth had found it, which was true enough.

Chryssi became a little more gracious as they walked down together and asked them - as everybody in the place always seemed to be asking - what they were all going to do today.

"Not our camp," Mary said sweetly. "We shan't want that any more, thank you."

* * *

The Lone Piners were the only guests at breakfast. The twins told the others before they all came down about their meeting with Chryssi and that she had been nosing about round their secret camp and always asking what they were going to do, so it might be wiser not to discuss their plans while she was serving them.

Marjorie Longden only appeared once, and after wishing them "Good morning", nobody was surprised when she asked them what they were going to do. Even the good-natured David replied shortly that they would let her know later - as usual.

When she had gone, Peter reminded him that Dan was probably coming over later.

"Why don't the three of us go for a ride, David? It's a grand morning and Marjorie would be glad for us to exercise the three ponies, I'm sure. Dan's keen on horses."

"Let's wait for him to telephone before we decide what to do," David laughed. "What's the matter with you, Dickie? Indigestion or something?"

"It is *not* indigestion," Mary spoke indignantly for her twin. "We have just decided to pay you all the compliment of giving you some secret and important news. All that Dickie is doing is trying to be polite and tell you something. We don't mind if we don't. We're not going riding. It's just that after our council last night we had decided to share with our colleagues some information we have been imparted."

Tom whistled in admiration.

"That's terrific, Mary. Jolly good speech. We'll all go upstairs and then Dickie can impart. I'm out of my depth but I reckon I know what you mean."

It was not often that Tom seemed to be on the side of the twins and so he was much in their favour as he escorted them up the stairs to their sitting-room.

"I shall never get used to this utterly fantastic luxury," Jenny remarked as she sprawled out on the big couch. "Do you know, I've read about this sort of idleness, but I didn't believe it could happen. Come and sit by me, Tom, and let the twins tell all."

Mary told them about Chryssi's earring and that she had admitted she had found the camp last night.

"I suppose she came to look for her earring this morning, but we're sure she'd been nosing round and trampling all over it. She must have seen us yesterday when we were up there minding-----"

"Not your own business, surely, Mary?" David interrupted. "What's Dickie got to tell us anyway? I don't think Chryssi can help being curious. When this place is full she won't have time to ask so many questions."

"She's more than just curious about what we're going to do," Dickie said shrewdly. "She wants to know *about* us ... I've found some secret plans but I

can't open them. I don't mind sharing them with the club if somebody will help me... Wait a sec. and I'll get them."

"He says he's going to keep them under his mattress," Mary said proudly. "It was Mackie who really found them yesterday."

Jenny raised herself from the couch and joined the others as they crowded round Dickie when he returned with his trophy. He explained how and where the container had been found, but even while doing so he felt that nobody except his loyal twin was really interested or expected much. Perhaps it would have been better to keep it a secret and borrow a tool to open it himself.

Tom came to the rescue. "I reckon that's a good find, Dickie. Shall we risk breaking the rusty old tube to see what's inside? I'll try with my knife if you like."

Tom's knife was a formidable weapon which he always carried on the farm, and he soon prised off one of the metal caps and handed the tube back to Dickie.

"Documents in there, mate. Maybe you've found something."

With shaking fingers, Dickie drew from the container a damp roll which, when opened out on the floor proved to be a photo-print of architect's plans. So stained were they however, that it was impossible to decipher any details except the name of an architect's firm and address in Exeter in the bottom right hand corner.

"Not to worry, twin," Mary said bravely. "You *know* they are secret, and because we can't read them they must be in code or invisible ink. I bet they really mean something and Chryssi was hunting for them when she lost her earring... I'll help you hide them again and then we'll plan an expedition with Mackie on our own."

While they were out of the room, Tom said, "I reckon the builders chucked those plans away when they'd finished with them. Or more likely the foreman put 'em down somewhere and they got scooped up with the rest of

the rubble... Tell you what. Maybe we'll all have a better time if we stopped being suspicious of everybody in sight and just did what we wanted to do. You'll all think I'm barmy but I wouldn't mind a long walk. I got a bit fat in that hospital. Who's going to show me Dartmoor?"

David looked at Peter.

"What about Dan? Is he coming over or not? Why not telephone him, Peter, and then we'll know where we are."

Peter was back in five minutes.

"I spoke to Mrs. Sturt. Dan went out about eight o'clock on a job, and she doesn't know when he'll be back. So we can all do what we like."

David had the sense to keep quiet, but Jenny said quickly,

"Look Peter. If you don't mind walking instead of riding, because I'm not as good as you with horses, why don't we do something together and let David and Tom do an enormous walk all over the Moor. We don't want either of them to get fat, do we? We needn't go too far and it would be fun because we don't often have a gossip. I'm sure the twins would rather be on their own so why shouldn't us girls have a day together? It will be restful for us without the boys."

Peter laughed and agreed, and so did the boys who huddled over the map. The twins came back and said they would like to go up the Swincombe with Mackie and try to dam some of its small tributaries, and they had already ordered their sandwiches. David knew they were familiar with that country and could be trusted. He and Tom planned to climb Believer Tor.

"This will be very good for your figure, Tom. Not too far away on the other side of the main road and only about 1,500 feet high. Just think of the view when you get there... What about 'us girls'? Want to see the map? Let me know if you want any advice?"

Peter did not deign to answer, and Jenny said, "I would like to go somewhere lonely and romantic and mysterious. The sort of place I've

never seen before and might never see again. I don't want to climb up any of these peculiar hills called Tors and I'm not very keen on paddling or swimming or fishing. Something mysterious, please Peter. Some place I'll never forget."

David brought the map over.

"Just the job, Jenny. Take her to Wistman's Wood, Peter. Along the Dart to Two Bridges, cross over the road, and follow the river north about one and a half miles. I was reading about it the other day. Fantastic, as Dickie would say. Dwarf oak trees, hundreds of years old, all twisted and gnarled and growing out of boulders and loose stones. There's a legend about the place which will appeal to Jenny. Wistman's Wood is haunted by the mysterious Wish Hounds' cheered on by the devil himself disguised as a ghostly huntsman called Dewar... What about it, Jenny? Tom and I will be looking for you from the top of Believer."

"Wonderful, David! You can come and rescue us if we get lost and fly signals of distress. I'm not very good at maps, but are you sure of the way, Peter? Shall we do Wistman's?"

Peter agreed and half an hour later, after they had gone to the end of the drive to see the two mountaineers on their way, they went to the house to pick up their sandwiches. As expected, Chryssi asked them where they were going and how long they would be. Peter thanked her and said she did not know.

The expedition was a great success. The walk along the river in the morning sunshine was a delight. As usual Jenny did most of the talking and just before they reached Two Bridges she said impetuously,

"Stop a minute, Peter. I can say it better when we're not walking. I want to say I'm sorry I was horrible to you the other night. I was very rude when I said you didn't care about Tom and me and didn't understand. I'm sorry, Peter. You're the very best friend I've got, but one of the things I hate about you is that you're so often right! Tom's better already, isn't he, and you were sure he would be. I'm sorry I said those foul things."

"Stop it, Jen!" Peter laughed. "I did know how you felt and we won't talk about it again. Tom's marvellous but don't get in a state if he seems to forget something again. You're a lucky girl... Come on. Let's find the mysterious wood and enjoy our picnic."

They crossed the main road, found the track David had shown them and began to climb by the side of a friendly stream which was soon narrower and running faster. There were no signs of civilization now. Not even the hum of traffic that had been so heavy at Two Bridges. Only the menace of the Moor and three great tors - one ahead and one to the east and the other on the west looming over them and hiding the summer sky.

They found themselves speaking in whispers as they came to the wood. There was no mistaking it for neither of the girls had seen anything like it before. The stunted oaks were not only growing out of the clutter of loose rocks but their branches sprawled out across the boulders, and rocks and trees alike were covered with a thick, grey moss.

"What's it like, Peter?" Jenny whispered. "It reminds me of something."

"Sleeping Beauty, Jen. Before the Prince kissed the Princess. I hate these trees with their clutching fingers. It's like the wood that poor little Snow White ran through in that film. What shall we do? Climb higher up the stream and find a place to picnic?"

They did this and enjoyed their meal in a pleasant patch of sunlight and while they were eating Jenny switched on her transistor. They were in time to hear part of the News, and then to their amazement the announcer mentioned the name of Dan Sturt.

"Here then is our special reporter Dan Sturt with an eye-witness account of what he saw in Brixham a few hours ago when the trawler *Lucky Girl* was taken over by Customs officers and police as soon as she touched the quay... Dan Sturt."

Dan was an experienced broadcaster and he told his story well.

"There was nothing about the trawler *Lucky Girl* when she came in with the tide this morning to suggest that she was carrying contraband. There were perhaps twenty or thirty of us enjoying the sunshine and the sight of a few of our traditional Devon fishing boats home again with yet another catch won from the sea. As good a way as any to spend one of my few idle hours, I was thinking, when two Customs officers appeared on the scene and perhaps a dozen policemen who must have been waiting nearby to clear us politely away from the edge of the quay. There was some shouting from the trawler and then, as a police van drove up, the three members of the crew, with coats over their heads, were quickly escorted into the van and driven off... Later, I was informed by Detective Sergeant Robert Hunter, in charge of the Task Force concerned, that the three men whose names I am not permitted to disclose, are helping the police with their enquiries regarding two cases of foreign firearms found under other cases of freshly caught fish. I am now at liberty to disclose that the authorities are greatly disturbed by the quantities of firearms being smuggled into this country and bought by a growing number of criminals prepared to use violence. Any news or evidence of smuggling, trading, hiring or use of firearms should be reported to your nearest police station. This is Dan Sturt returning you to the News Room."

"Well! What do you know?" Jenny exclaimed as she switched off and sat back on her heels. "No wonder Dan couldn't come riding with you this morning. Where's Brixham anyway, and why was he lounging about there in the sunshine instead of coming to King's Holt like he said?"

"Sounds as if he knew something was going to happen," Peter laughed as she got up. "Mrs. Sturt didn't say where he was, but I suppose she wouldn't even if she did know... Let's go back now, Jenny. I don't like Wistman's Wood and we've got to go through it to get home. If David and Tom aren't there we might go and meet them on two of the ponies if they're available. No good saying you can't ride, Jenny, because you've been up on my Sally several times at home. Come on."

They went back the same way, through the grey and ghostly wood, down the hill to Two Bridges, over the road and along the river towards the back of King's Holt. Although they were tired, Peter suggested that they find the

twins' "Mount Morton" and see if they were camping there. Jenny protested that her feet hurt, but followed her, and when they had scaled the heights they realized what a good view there was of the yard. To the north they also noticed the drive and saw a white estate car turn in from the main road.

"Looks like the Longdens," Peter said. "We'll go down and see what's happening. I hope the boys are back because they'll be interested in our news about Dan."

They had nearly reached the stables when Mrs. Longden drove into the yard, turned and reversed close to the workshop. The Colonel appeared as his wife got out of the driving seat. He opened the doors at the back of the car and lifted out a heavy metal case of fish. Neither of them heard the girls approaching, but when Jenny stepped forward and spoke the man nearly dropped his burden.

"More fish for us?" Jenny asked. "Lovely fish! Have you heard the exciting news on lunchtime Radio News? Dan Sturt, Peter's friend, did it. He was at Brixham and saw some fishermen arrested because the police knew they were carrying a cargo of guns. Dan was super! Fancy seeing smuggling actually happen! Dan said the police think all these guns and things are for criminals like those the Mortons saw in London. We were wondering just now where all these guns are hidden. Isn't it exciting?"

Neither of the girls noticed the quick glance which passed between the two Longdens. Marjorie covered up quickly.

"Perhaps it is, Jenny, but this salmon is more important just now. It's fresh from the Torridge and a special treat for you all tonight. You two girls can come into the kitchen now and help me unpack it, then we'll decide how to serve it. Bill will carry the cases in for us. One at a time, Bill, else we shall have you in bed with lumbago."

9. Where's My Girl?

The twins and Macbeth were tired when they returned from their explorations in the late afternoon. The Colonel was seeing off a party of four who had just been shown over the house and dutifully bought their Dartmoor ponies. He looked tired too and told them he had had a busy afternoon, and decided not to have any more resident visitors until after Christmas.

"You're the first back. Ask Chryssi for some tea. Marjorie has taken Kina in to Ashburton in the car to see a Cypriot friend."

Half an hour later the twins strolled down to the gate and had not long to wait before David and Tom arrived.

"Girls back yet?" the latter asked. "Can't wait to tell them that I must have lost about three pounds."

"You don't look any thinner to us," Mary said. "Still gross... No. We haven't seen Peter or Jenny. We've come here to meet them."

"They won't come this way on the main road if they're walking," David explained. "We know where they've gone and I told them to cross the road at Two Bridges and come back by the river. Maybe they're back by now. They wouldn't ask for a lift... Car coming now... Look out, twins, it's signalling to turn in here. Looks like the Longdens' car."

"It is," Dickie said. "It's the Marjorie woman with fat Kina. The Colonel told us they've been to Ashburton."

Mrs. Longden seemed reluctant to stop until Mary waved to her. She was not looking her cool and collected self and they hardly recognized Kina sitting beside her in her best clothes. "Hope you've all had a good day," Marjorie said. "How have the two girls got on? Did they enjoy themselves?"

"We're waiting for them now," David answered, "but they may have come in the back way."

"Don't be too long," Marjorie said. "It's seven o'clock and there's fresh salmon for dinner. If the two girls are back by now I'll tell them you're on your way."

"I don't like Kina," Mary remarked as the car disappeared. "And I wish Jenny and Peter were here. We'll come back with you now, David."

But the girls were not there, and from that moment the four Lone Piners realized, in their different ways, that something was wrong. David was positive that if Peter said they were going to Wistman's Wood they would go there, but if, for some reason they had gone elsewhere and knew they would be late, she would have telephoned. He told Tom this, but did not show how worried he was and suggested that they walk some way along the river bank to meet them. They promised the twins they would be back in half an hour.

They met nobody and when they turned back Tom said bluntly, "I don't like this, David. Something has happened to them and we'd better face it. Neither of them are the sort to forget the time. They've both got watches and Jen will have taken her transistor. We'll tell the Longdens and the police too... Wait! Here's young Dickie coming to meet us. Maybe they've turned up."

They ran to meet him but he was too breathless to speak at first and could only shake his head when they asked him if the two girls had returned. David put his arm round his brother's shoulders and waited until he could find the words. At last: "It's Dan Sturt. He's come in his car to see us all and he's telling the Longdens something about guns being smuggled into Brixham and the police were there and so was he. I told him we don't know where Peter and Jenny are and Mary an' me thought he might be able to help us find them-----"

"You're a good chap, Dickie," Tom interrupted. "Come on, David. Sturt can help us if we can persuade him to stop talking about himself. He's got a car

and we must do something right now. I want my girl and I reckon you want yours. No good pretending this isn't serious. We're fooling ourselves."

David nodded. He was feeling sick with anxiety and did not like to admit it in front of Dickie who was already upset enough. As they hurried back he did what he could to comfort his brother but was not very successful. Dan was still talking to the Longdens in the yard and Mary, when she saw them, ran to meet them.

"Sorry about this bother, David," Dan said. "Let me help if I can. Mary says the girls went to Wistman's Wood this morning. Tell us everything you know and Bill and Marjorie must be in on this too."

David leaned against the scarlet Mini and told the story again, emphasizing that everyone who knew Peter could be certain that if she was in trouble she would telephone if she could.

"Wistman's Wood is not more than five miles from here, Dan. If one of them has had an accident the other would telephone."

"If she dared to leave the other," Dan said quietly. "The Colonel says he has been here all the afternoon. I know what you've got to do and so do you."

"Take us as near as you can to this wood," Tom said impetuously. "David says it's not big and we can search it before dark. What are we waiting for?"

"We've got to tell the police first," Dan insisted. "I've got a pal in the local Task Force. He'll help and know what to do. May I use your telephone, Colonel?"

"Surely you're being a bit previous, Dan. It's only eight o'clock and won't be dark for at least two hours. We want to do all we can to help, but I'm not all that keen on getting King's Holt in the news until we're sure we're in trouble. I mean, the two girls might have changed their minds and gone into Plymouth."

"But they didn't telephone did they, Colonel?" David said sharply. "You would have known because you - or somebody - was here all the afternoon?"

You said so... Come on, Dan. We'll do as you say."

"Leave it to me," Dan said as he turned to go into the house. "Better look after those twins. They don't look too good."

Then events moved swiftly. David and Tom persuaded the twins to show them their secret camp, and although this expedition was not a hilarious success it passed ten minutes until they saw Dan come out of the yard again.

"I've told the Longdens," he said when they joined him. "There's a patrol car on the way, and we're to tell the Sergeant everything before we go off on our own to search for them. Fact is, David, they can do this better and quicker than we can... You twins can help them too by answering their questions quickly and truthfully."

"What about Mackie?" Mary asked in a small voice. "He can help too. He's very brave and faithful."

Marjorie Longden then suggested that while they were waiting for the police they should come in and eat. The meal was not a success. Chryssi did not seem particularly interested in any of them, and although David tried to put up a good show, Tom hardly spoke. Mary broke up the party by bursting into tears, maintaining that she utterly loathed fish and specially salmon, and ran out of the dining-room.

The others, with Dickie in the lead, followed and were in time to see the Police Patrol car pull up outside the front door. The driver was a pleasant young man, the burly Sergeant had a large moustache and a surprisingly small voice while the third occupant of the car was a smart and pretty woman police constable. She took one look at Mary's tears, freshened her face with a clean handkerchief and then asked her name.

No time was wasted. The Longdens led the way indoors and only the driver stayed in the car with his radio telephone. First, the Sergeant told them that no accident cases had been admitted to local hospitals and that Wistman's Wood was being searched with dogs. The young woman constable told the twins they might call her Susan. She then took down the fullest possible

descriptions of the two girls and what they were wearing, and these details were passed to the driver for circulation.

W.P.C. Susan then asked Mrs. Longden if she might search the girls' bedroom. Mary went with her and was very helpful by telling her more about her two friends and their backgrounds and characteristics. Susan was particularly interested in Jenny's love of romantic reading.

"Tell me, Mary. Do you mean that Jenny often acts what she reads about? Does she sometimes pretend to be one of the people in the story?"

"Oh no! Jenny is always just like Jenny. She doesn't think about anybody much except Tom. She does read a lot I know and I expect she watches telly too. She loves pop and both she and Tom always take their transistors with them... Look, Susan. That's funny. Here's her transistor on her dressing table."

"Why funny, Mary? Are you sure it's hers?"

"Oh yes. Peter hasn't got one. It's funny because I'm sure Jenny would have taken it with her this morning. She always does. I wonder why she left it behind today?"

Susan took a note of this and then asked Mary if either of the girls had any friends in Devon - somebody they might have gone to see.

"No, Susan, of course not. Only us and Dan Sturt who lives at Princetown and is helping us now."

When they came downstairs Dickie told them that the Sergeant had been talking to the three Cypriots and had then searched the house with the Colonel and Mrs. Longden.

"He's just gone outside now with David and Tom and they didn't seem to want me... Peter and Jenny will be all right won't they, Susan?"

"I'm sure they will, Dickie. We shall find them for you but you must be brave and patient."

There was not much more she could say to them because she knew the sort of questions the Sergeant was now asking the two boys.

"I'm treating you two lads sensibly because I trust you," he was saying. "There's nothing much more we can do here tonight, and I agree, David, that you should telephone the girls' parents. We haven't news yet from Wistman's but I've got to ask you one or two more questions I didn't want those two kids to hear. First is, can they swim - would they have gone bathing somewhere?"

David answered that Peter was a wonderful swimmer and could not drown in any water.

"Had they plenty of money with them, enough to go on to Plymouth?" was the next question.

David was sure that if they had changed their plans they would have telephoned, and was insistent that neither of the two girls would have accepted lifts unless it was to help somebody else.

Tom then said that Jenny was in Plymouth with him yesterday and loved it, but she had not said anything to him this morning about going there again. He did not think Jenny had much money. The Sergeant followed this up and David suddenly realized that Tom seemed a little puzzled and uncertain with his answers and hoped that he was not losing his memory again. Before the Sergeant could question them further, Mrs. Longden ran out to say that David's father was on the telephone and wanted to speak to him. "I didn't tell him of our trouble, David. Better that you should do so yourself..."

Mr. Morton was ringing to see if all was well and to suggest that they might come down for the weekend.

"Listen, Dad. I was just going to ring you. We're in trouble. Peter and Jenny went for a walk and have disappeared and we've had to tell the police. No news yet, but could you come at once and take the twins away if we haven't found the girls by morning? They've got dogs searching for them, Dad. It would be wonderful if you could come."

Mr. Morton wasted no words.

"I'll be with you for a late breakfast. Give the twins my love and say I'll be on my way. Telephone your mother here anytime you have more news. Would you like me to telephone Mr. Sterling at Witchend and Jenny's father too?"

David sighed with relief. "Marvellous, Dad. I feel better already. No, thanks. I think I should telephone Peter's father. See you in the morning... Love to Mother... Goodbye."

When he put the receiver down he realized that Tom and the twins were standing behind him.

"Dad's on his way," he told them. "Go and tell the Longdens and the Sergeant, please Tom, and say I'm now telephoning Mr. Sterling. I'll ask him to tell the Harmans and Ingles... Go with Tom, twins, and tell your friend Susan what I'm doing."

It was typical of Mr. Sterling not to interrupt David while he told him the bad news. Typical too that his first words in reply were thanks. "Thank you, David for telling me in such a straightforward way. I will telephone Ingles and the Harmans at once and you will telephone me any time in the night when you get news. I suspect that it's too late for me to come to you now, my boy, but some of us will come tomorrow if all is not well... I trust you, David. God bless you and pray that our girls may be safe and unharmed."

The Sergeant and the Longdens were waiting to speak to him, and they noticed him brush his hand across his eyes before he spoke.

"Peter's father will come in the morning from Shropshire - she hasn't got a mother - if we haven't had news. He's telephoning Jenny's parents now... What can we do now?"

The Colonel answered quickly.

"Sergeant has offered to leave a constable here all night, but I've told him it isn't necessary. The police will telephone the moment they have news and

of course we shall do the same if the girls turn up or telephone. You young people must get some sleep and Marjorie is getting you hot drinks now... Wait. Here's our charming constable with news."

"We've just heard that Wistman's Wood has been searched," W.P.C. Susan said with a smile. "No sign of anything unusual although the dogs' handlers are sure that the girls have been there and a little way up the stream they found where somebody had a picnic meal. Goodnight, twins. Be brave. I expect we'll have news for you in the morning."

When the police had gone, Marjorie Longden brought in a tray of hot drinks and sandwiches and made them all sit down in the lounge.

"This will help you all to sleep," and then, aside to David, "I've put a little aspirin in the twins' mugs. They really must sleep tonight."

She had done more than that because they all slept very soundly. David put the twins in the girls' two beds so that they should not be separated and slept himself in the dressing-room next door.

Tom, yawning prodigiously, went off to his own bed. Whether the sleeping draught Mrs. Longden had put in his cocoa was not as strong as the others or whether he was wakened by a noise he never knew, but he woke soon after dawn. Before his eyes were open he remembered Jenny and was shocked by the sudden realization of what she meant to him. He was always taking her devotion for granted, but there had never been any other girl for him and perhaps he did not tell her often enough. "I'm your girl, aren't I, Tom? You said so," she had reminded him only two days ago when they were lying in the sunshine on Plymouth Hoe. That had been a wonderful day and all through the last few weeks after his accident she'd always been there.

He sat up in bed, suddenly tortured by the realization that after his accident perhaps he had been slow to realize that she had come to him whenever she could, both in hospital and at Ingles.

The more he thought about that day in Plymouth, the more certain he became that something important had happened after they had left the Hoe.

Something that would help them now to find the girls. He sat up and put his hands to his head as he struggled to restore his treacherous memory.

Perhaps if he talked to David it would help? He might ask Tom questions to which he could find the answer? He might already have told him more about the day in Plymouth than he could now remember?

He got out of bed and went into the corridor, but instead of going first to wake David, he looked out of the window from which he could see into the yard. It was only just six o'clock, but to his amazement he saw two vans backed almost side by side towards the Colonel's workshop which was out of his vision. One van was plain brown and the other bore the message ANTIQUES, ANCIENT HOUSE, BRIXHAM and, as he watched, Tom saw three men at work loading the vans with heavy wooden boxes and some metal containers. One man was the Colonel, another very tall and thin whom Tom did not recognize, but the third loading the dirty brown van was red-headed and walked with a slight limp.

Suddenly Tom remembered. His heart thudded with excitement, and he was almost too breathless to speak as he opened the door of the girls' room. The twins were still sleeping and so was David in the adjoining room. Tom leaned over him and shook his shoulder.

"Wake up, David. Bring your clothes and join me in the corridor. Be quiet and don't wake the twins. *Wake up*. It's me, Tom. I'm on to something, David. Honest I am. I've got my memory back and a clue about our girls. I'm not fooling. Come quick!"

David sat up and rubbed his eyes. "O.K., Tom. I'm on my way."

Tom patted Macbeth on Mary's bed and the dog wagged his tail in response as he went out. He ran down their corridor and locked the door at the end and then went back to the window. The Brixham van had gone and as he watched he saw the red-headed man drive off, but there was no sign of the Colonel when David touched him on the shoulder.

"Into our room," Tom whispered. "We must get cracking."

While they were scrambling into their clothes, Tom told him what he had seen.

"The Brixham van was from an antique shop, but the point is, David, that the Colonel - if he still is one - was helping both men to load boxes back into their vans. The wooden cases for Brixham and two sorts of fish boxes into the other. *He was putting them in instead of taking them out and they were very heavy.* The fish boxes were the same sort Jen and I saw the sandy-haired bloke putting into the Colonel's car in Plymouth. That's what I couldn't remember but now I'm sure, and I remember too that the Colonel wasn't too pleased to see us there. He called the sandy-headed chap Charlie and what we've got to do is to go to Plymouth and find that van and his fish shop."

"Marvellous, Tom," David said as he pulled his shirt over his head. "This is terrific. I remember the Colonel telling me that a chap in Brixham helped him to polish the carved ponies but this seems an odd time to collect more in such a hurry. I've been uneasy about the Longdens, but until my father comes we dare not let them know we're suspicious of them. We know for certain now that the Colonel has some connection with an antique shop in Brixham and a fish shop in Plymouth... Tom. Listen! Do you think that the girls might, by chance, have discovered something which would incriminate them?... You do, don't you, Tom?"

"Shouldn't be surprised, chum. Shouldn't be surprised at anything, but I'm going to Plymouth whether you come or not."

"You think they've got the girls out of the way because they know too much? Could be, Tom. I'll come with you but we'll call in Dan to help and he can take us in his Mini, and we must tell the police where we're going. We dare not telephone from here so I must leave a note for my father with the twins. We can trust them, but won't tell them *everything* we've found out and suspect. They're scared enough as it is. Come on. We'll tell them now."

The twins accepted the bombshell as if it were a meringue! Tom sat on the end of Dickie's bed and David on Mary's. David did the talking and told them briefly that they were going out at once to follow up a clue with Dan's help to find Jenny and Peter. He warned them not to make the Longdens or

the Cypriots suspicious, not to take any drinks they were offered, and not to give the note he was about to write to anybody except their father who was on his way to them now.

"If you're in real trouble or fed up with waiting, telephone to Mrs. Sturt at the Moorland Pixie," Tom added. "We can't tell you everything we've found out but you know how we trust you... And another thing, twins. We don't think that Peter and Jenny will be hurt and we believe they'll be found today."

The twins were out of bed before Tom had finished speaking.

"Go and write the note to Daddy," Dickie said. "We'll come and find you in your room."

They joined them in five minutes.

"We're glad you asked us to do something," Mary announced. "We've got two ideas for you. We'll come downstairs with you when you're ready to go and bring Mackie. If anybody comes when you're unlocking the front door, you can say we're taking Mackie for his little walkies. And another thing. Why don't you ask that smashing W.P.C. Susan to come and keep an eye on us? We like her - and so does Mackie - and nobody could hurt us then."

Then Dickie, who had been very quiet, had the last word as he put the note for his father in his pocket.

"We'll be O.K., David. Not to worry about us. One thing more I've thought of. You remember when we met you and Tom at the end of the drive yesterday and Marjorie drove up with fat Kina? You remember she said she'd been to Ashburton? Well, if she had, she'd come back about fifty miles round the Moor. She came from Two Bridges way and that means from Tavistock or Okehampton or Plymouth. Of course she may have been taking Kina and her friend for a ride round and round Dartmoor, which I doubt. See what I mean?"

Tom slapped him on the shoulder.

"Good for you, Richard. You're both my favourite twins. Up the Lone Piners."

The front door was unlocked but there was no sound in the house and although the Colonel might still have been in his workshop he could not see the drive from there. David hated leaving the twins and turned twice to wave to them as they stood bravely alone with Mackie in the porch.

"Don't worry about them, David," Tom said as they hurried down the drive. "The Longdens wouldn't dare to touch them, and I'm going to stop the first car we see. We can be in Princetown in ten minutes."

From that moment the luck turned in their favour. They got their lift after five minutes walking and found Dan at an early breakfast.

"Was just coming over to see you. I've already telephoned the police and there's no news yet of the girls but their descriptions are out everywhere now. Not to worry. We'll find them... Mum will give you some coffee while you talk."

He was fascinated by their story and was too excited to finish his breakfast when Tom mentioned the Brixham van.

"That rings a bell, Tom. I saw that very same van unloading something in the yard at King's Holt when I went over there on my own the first time. Marjorie was with me and hurried me away when she saw it there. I'll ring Bob Hunter again now and tell him what you say and that he'd better send some of his chaps to look at antiques and Brixham... And then I'll take you to Plymouth and help you to find that fish shop and the sandy-haired fishmonger."

"Don't say too much about that until I'm sure," Tom said. "I've got a hunch but we'll call the police in as soon as I'm sure my memory isn't playing tricks again."

"And remind them that my father is on his way and I've left the twins on their own, and will he please send the beautiful Susan to look after them," David said.

Dan nodded. "Have some bread and marmalade while I'm on the phone. Mum will look after you."

He was back in five minutes.

"All fixed. Bob is impressed and says he'll get busy. I told him we'd ring from Plymouth and meantime Susan is on her way to King's Holt... Cheerio, Mum. See you sometime."

David and Tom thanked the imperturbable Mrs. Sturt and the three of them went out to the scarlet Mini.

"That's fine," Tom said. "We're getting somewhere. Now where's my girl? Our girls, I mean."

10. Our Girls

There had been no obvious reason for Peter and Jenny to refuse Mrs. Longden's invitation to follow her into the King's Holt kitchens. Neither of them had seen the quick glance between husband and wife when Jenny had described Dan Sturt's broadcast about the trawler *Lucky Girl*, and almost before they realized what had happened they were in the house.

Marjorie led the way and the Colonel followed, carrying one of the heavy cases of fish which he put on a table in a big scullery. After rinsing his hands at the sink, while Marjorie was talking to the girls in the working kitchen beyond, he went back to the door and slipped up the catch.

"Yes, it is a lovely kitchen," Marjorie was saying when he joined them. "It cost a lot to modernize it, but it will be worth while... I wanted the girls to see what we've done, Bill, and as the three Cypriots are off duty today why don't the four of us have a cup of tea in here. And a nice gossip."

Peter found it difficult to imagine that the handsome, but not very chatty, Colonel would want to spend much time gossiping to two girls he hardly knew. But he was friendly enough, and while Jenny was exploring the kitchen and admiring the numerous gadgets with Marjorie, he sat down and asked Peter some casual questions about Dan's broadcast.

"Young Sturt is a very bright young man, Peter. He's keen to do a TV interview with us here, which would be good for us, I suppose. But if what he said was true about gun running on the coast here, that sort of publicity won't help. I don't like it. Don't know whether Marjorie mentioned it, but when Mr. Warrender comes back from France we may suggest to him that we close down here until Christmas. It's not worth the trouble for a few guests, and the Cypriots want a holiday... Did Sturt give any indication about the number of police involved or who was in charge? I'd like to ask him more about this. Too much publicity of this kind will be very bad for all the hotels in Devon..."

Jenny and Marjorie, at the end of their tour of kitchen equipment came back to the table. Jenny put down her transistor and smiled at the Colonel.

"I heard what you said about Dan. It would be super if he would come here and interview us all. It isn't News time yet, but p'raps he'll be on again presently. If we're still here I'll switch on... Wasn't it funny us seeing you buying more fish in Plymouth yesterday? Do you always buy your salmon from that sandy-haired little man? I don't think I've ever tasted real salmon in my life. Only out of a tin. We'd like to see yours when you unpack it. Have you ever had it, Peter?"

Above the girls' heads the Colonel gave his wife an almost imperceptible nod.

"We buy from the best sources, Jenny, and we thought fresh salmon from a Devon river would be a treat for us all... What about that tea, Marjorie? I think Kina is in their sitting-room and she won't mind making it for you even on her day off. She's the best tea-maker I know... Come and see the salmon, girls."

Marjorie went into another room and the Colonel took the girls into the scullery. Peter had once heard somebody say that the salmon was a brave and beautiful fish and there was no doubt that the six, packed in ice, in the metal case opened by the Colonel were fine specimens. But there was nothing else. Only salmon, which the Colonel put in the deep freeze with a smile and the comment, "Fish again, Jenny!"

It was about now that Peter began to feel uncertain and to wonder why they had been asked in here. Jenny was still chattering when Marjorie called them into the kitchen again and invited them to sit down. She was followed by Kina carrying a tea tray, but a Kina the girls hardly recognized. She was wearing a garish and a most "unslimming" dress and was chewing gum. Peter smiled and wished her "Good afternoon", but all she got in reply was a stony glance. Perhaps she was officially off-duty and waiting on them as a favour?

As they sipped their strong, sweet tea Marjorie asked them when they expected the others back and Jenny began to explain that they were

climbing a very high mountain from which they were hoping to look down on them at Wistman's Wood.

"Thass ver, ver funny," Jenny said slowly. "You unnerstan why... We're not there. We're here with lovely, lovely fish..."

Jenny was speaking now from very far away, and as Peter looked at her in amazement her friend's face moved towards her and then quickly away again. Then the room began to sway and as Peter struggled to stand up she heard someone saying, "What about the other box, Colonel... What about the one you didn't show us?... Let's open that one..." and she realized that the voice was her own.

Now there was a great roaring in her ears and a shattering crash as she dropped her tea cup. Before she fell forward across the table she could just hear Jenny's voice again, still slurred but agonizing: "Peter, Peter, we've been drugged!"

After that, everything was a hazy hotch-potch of impressions. Later, when they tried to recall what had happened, they both remembered being helped or lifted into a car and the fastidious Peter was sure there had been a smell of chewing gum. But neither of them had any recollection of being taken out of a car or of where they had been taken.

Peter was the first to recover her senses and her first impression was of a hideous hammering noise. Her head ached and her mouth was dry but when she slowly opened her eyes she realized that she was sitting back in a reasonably comfortable chair in a smallish darkened room. The hammering was behind her. Bang... Bang... Bang... Pause. Bang... Bang... Like a man hammering nails into wood, she thought. Her head was aching so badly that she closed her eyes... The hammering stopped and she heard the sound of breathing and remembered Jenny. Where was she? Peter did not want to wake. Sleep was better because her head would not ache. Then, from miles away she heard uneven footsteps and sensed that somebody was close and looking at her. Surely a man? She dared not open her eyes as the footsteps moved away and she heard the click of a door lock.

She drowsed then for a little and was rudely awakened by Jenny shaking her and imploring her to speak. Her head was better now and as she stood up she realized that she was not even dizzy.

The room was nearly dark because the window was boarded up, but they could see that they were in a bedroom, quite well furnished in an old-fashioned way with two chairs, a chest of drawers and a large single bed with brass knobs - two at the head and two at the foot. They were trying to look through a crack between two of the boards across the window when the door was unlocked and the light switched on.

They turned to see a large, middle-aged woman wearing black trousers and a purple cardigan. Her dark hair was strained back with a central parting. Her eyes were grey and staring and her complexion pale.

"Sit down," she ordered in an expressionless voice. "Keep away from that window and listen. You've got to be good, sensible girls. You're both going to stay here for a few days, but if you do as you're told and don't make trouble you won't be hurt. Nobody wants any unpleasantness, but if you make a noise or try to escape you will be put somewhere that isn't so comfortable."

"But you can't do this to us," Peter said, and was ashamed that her voice was shaking. "Who are you? Where are we? We've been drugged and abducted. You must let us go at once so that we can tell our friends who will be looking for us... Don't take any notice of her, Jen."

"You're not listening to what I say," the woman went on implacably. "You don't want to be hurt, do you? Don't waste your breath asking questions because nobody is going to answer you. You've got a good bed to sleep in and if you behave yourselves I'll bring you food and drink and take you in turn to the bathroom... And remember this. You won't know it, but somebody will be listening outside this locked door so it won't pay you to do anything silly."

But Jenny did. She was a good-natured girl, but occasionally she showed a redhead's temper. The longer she listened to this hateful woman's flat, menacing voice, the angrier she became and suddenly she made a rush for

the door. The woman moved quickly like a big cat, picked up Jenny as if she were a baby, took three steps and flung her on the bed.

"Little fool," she said as Peter ran to Jenny. "And if I have any more trouble you'll be separated and you won't like that."

Jenny sat up on the bed and pushed back her hair. "You're a revolting old woman," she shouted. "Didn't you hear what my friend said? We've been drugged by people called Longden at King's Holt and the police must be told at once."

Peter put her hand over her mouth. "That's enough, Jen. We know that our friends will find us and then this woman will be in real trouble."

Only Jenny's sobs of anger broke the long silence. Then their gaoler moved to the door, switched off the light and removed the bulb.

"Any more of that nonsense and I can arrange for you both to take a sea voyage and you can be sure you won't be as comfortable as you are here," she said and locked the door behind her.

The two girls sat together on the bed and spoke in whispers. Peter calmed Jenny and they comforted each other with the certainty that the boys would be searching for them now, even if they had not yet realized that the Longdens must be criminals connected with gun running.

"It's my fault we're here," Jenny confessed. "If only I'd kept quiet about all the fish coming in to King's Holt and Tom and me seeing him yesterday with that sandy-haired little horror. They may tell the boys all sorts of lies about us and the trouble is that we don't know where we are. We might be in London. We don't know what day it is, but I've just looked at my watch and it's nearly 9 o'clock."

The minutes ticked away as they tried to reason things out. They agreed that they had both been in a car. Peter remembered the banging and a feeling that a man had been in the room and they realized that he had been boarding up the window so that they could not open it or break the glass. They tried in vain to move one of the planks, but they could see only the faintest gleam

of grey light through the cracks. As the window was closed they could hear no identifiable sounds.

They were still whispering when they heard the key in the lock and the door opened.

"Stay where you are," the woman said. "You wouldn't want me to call my husband, would you? He's waiting on the stairs just in case you're naughty."

"Don't answer her," Peter whispered. "Don't speak to her about anything."

Their gaoler came into the room with the light bulb and a tray on which was bread, cheese, margarine and two apples, and told them to get on with it. They were hungry and ate in silence while the woman sat on the bed. When they had finished she took them in turn to the bathroom - locking the door on the one who was left in the room. Then she took away the tray and the bulb leaving them in the dark again.

There was nothing much they could do but try to sleep. They lay together on the bed and talked of David and Tom, of course, and then of their homes.

"When we're both married," Jenny whispered. "We'll still see each other sometimes, won't we? I mean wherever you and David go. Tom and I will be at Ingles, I expect... Have you ever thought how strange it is that neither of us has got a mother, Peter?"

"Yes, I have, Jen. I'm sure all Lone Piners will always be true to each other whatever happens, as our funny old oath says... And you have got a stepmother, Jenny. I'm sure she's very fond of you and you're horrid to her sometimes, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. She's jealous of Dad and me and now she's jealous of Tom and me. Tom told me I'm wrong about this and I must try to be different."

"Your dad would be pleased if you did try, wouldn't he, Jenny? My father is wonderful to me. He never says what he'll do when I'm not at Witchend any more. I suppose they've told our families now that we've disappeared. I wonder whether the boys are still being fooled by the Longdens and those

three Cypriots. And what's Dan doing? He'll help them. I s'pose we're lucky. Lucky to have so many who care about what happens to us... You won't laugh at me will you, Jen? I'm going to say my prayers. My father does. And not only to ask for things but to say thank you for what we've got. I don't always. I make excuses to myself and say only kids do it."

When Peter got up from her knees Jenny whispered softly to her, "Can you see me, Peter? I'm by the window. Please come."

Peter felt her way across the room. Jenny was standing as close as possible to the shuttered window with her ear to the crack between the boards. She held out her hand to her friend and drew her close. Peter could feel the tears on her cheeks.

"I've said a sort of prayer standing up," she whispered. "Peter, I believe I know where we are. Far, far away I heard a big clock striking. We're in a town and I believe it's Plymouth... You remember that fat Kina smelled of chewing gum? This woman here smells of fish and I believe we're in a house near the one where Tom and I saw Longden and the sandy-haired man putting cases of fish in his car. There was a fish shop next to the yard where they both came from. Although the Colonel offered us a lift back to King's Holt we knew he wasn't pleased to see us. These people here are in league with the Longdens, Peter, and now I know where we are, it's not so bad, is it? I'm sure Tom and David - and maybe with Dan to help them - will find us. I could go to sleep now."

They slept until morning, but Peter's last thoughts, which she kept to herself, were that the Longdens were not likely to give themselves away to the others, unless they just disappeared in the night - and the other was Tom's memory. Even if there was a clue which suggested Plymouth to the others, how much of his trip with Jenny would Tom be able to remember without her help?

Jenny woke first. Enough light was coming through the boarded-up window for her to see the watch Tom had given her last Christmas. Just after eight. Dear Tom! She raised herself on one elbow and looked down on Peter breathing gently beside her. What would she have done without Peter to give her courage and help her after she had lost her temper last night? And

what were they going to do now? Dare they tell the horrible woman that they knew where they were? Then she remembered her threat of sending them on a sea voyage and that confirmed her belief that their captors had some connection with the sea.

She got out of bed and tip-toed to the window. There was enough daylight now for her to see through the crack a line of red roof-tops. Old rooftops with old chimney pots, so this also proved that they were in a town.

When she turned round Peter was sitting on the edge of the bed. She looked tousled, flushed and pretty. "I feel better, Jen. You look better too. It wouldn't do either of us any harm to have a bath, but I don't want one in this house. I believe I heard a telephone ringing in the night. Did you? Oh, well! I don't think I was dreaming. What do we do when that ghastly woman comes in? Say nothing? Act sulky?"

"No, Peter. I was thinking about that. Let's do a twins' act and get her muddled and show her we don't care and threaten her. Last night she bullied us. I'm sure the boys will find us today."

Peter was not so sure. David had never failed her yet, but she doubted if Jenny realized that they were in the power of very wicked and unscrupulous people. She could not believe that they were in physical danger, but the threat and possibility of moving them elsewhere might be real.

"All right, Jenny. We'll see if we can shake her, but don't drink any tea or coffee that she brings. Only water out of the bathroom tap and if we don't like the taste of anything, don't eat it either... Here she comes. Not a sign that we're scared of her."

"I'm not any more," Jenny whispered as the key turned in the lock and the woman came in with a tray, put it on the chest of drawers and went through the usual performance of locking the door behind her.

"Don't bother to do that," Peter said with a bright smile. "We never eat until we've washed. I'm sorry you didn't ask us what we'd like for breakfast because that would have saved you trouble. Neither of us like tea. Or coffee. Or cocoa."

The woman was wearing the same hideous clothes as last night and when she had replaced the bulb and switched on the light, they saw that she was still as pale. "Suet-face," Peter called her when recalling this experience later, but now, before she could reply Jenny spoke.

"We'll go along together to the bathroom if that would save you trouble. You must be very busy at this time in the morning looking after your husband. When we've washed and tidied ourselves we want to have a chat with you. Before the others come for us."

This speech was effective. The woman's face and pudgy neck became blotched in patches and her mouth fell open with surprise.

"You're both crazy," she whispered. "Shut your mouths you stuck-up brats."

"There's no need to be rude," Peter added. "We only want to warn you that you're going to be very sorry for what you've done to us. We'll wait until after breakfast if you wish, but we would like to go to the bathroom now, please."

There was no doubt that the woman was puzzled as well as angry as the two girls played for time and tormented her. She refused to let them out of the room together and eventually escorted Jenny first. While she was alone, Peter smelled the tea in the pot and believed it to be harmless, and as the food offered was only slices from a cut loaf, margarine and fish paste, she felt that they could risk eating it. When Jenny returned, she winked at Peter and said, "I've had a nice drink of water, but this lady hasn't got a spare toothbrush. I'm sorry we forgot to bring ours." Then she pinched her nose between finger and thumb as if to keep out an unpleasant smell and pursed her lips in such a way that Peter knew she wanted to say "Fisssh."

When her turn came, Peter was so disgusted with the woman that she did not speak until she and Jenny were together again in their prison. Then while they munched the unappetising bread, the two girls warmed to their task as they realized that their gaoler was becoming increasingly impatient and uneasy. Peter began, "We don't know each other's names yet, but it doesn't really matter as this is going to be such a short visit. If you will tell us where we are and let us go now, it will be better for you in the end. Our

friends are on the way now, probably with the police and we shouldn't think it's very nice to be arrested for abducting two girls. David's father is a lawyer, Jenny; remind me to ask him when he comes about the sort of punishment for this sort of crime."

"Yes, I will," Jenny agreed. "I'm looking forward to telling Tom about this woman and how she threw me on the bed last night. Did I tell you that I'm sure I've seen her husband before..."

Before she could finish the sentence, the woman stepped forward, grabbed Jenny by the shoulder and raised her other hand to strike her. Peter picked up the heavy teapot from the tray and jumped to her feet.

"Get out of here if you won't let us go. If you dare to hurt Jenny you'll be sorry!"

While she was still shouting, they heard a tremendous noise from somewhere below them and then the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs. Then, as Jenny heard her name shouted, she wrenched herself free, ran to the door and beat it with her fists.

"We're here Tom! Locked in this room. Come quickly!" The woman threw her to the ground as Peter, with all her strength, flung the heavy teapot at her. She missed, but the pot smashed to fragments on the floor. Their enemy slipped on the broken crockery and mess of cold tea, then began to grope on her knees for the key she had dropped.

From the other side of the door came the noise of battle - war-cries from David, and Tom calling encouragement to the girls, the sound of blows, grunts of pain and a horrible cursing from a man who was obviously being driven along the landing. Then the woman began to swear as Peter stamped on her hand and kicked the key towards Jenny. Almost before they realized what had happened they had won. There was a crash against the door and Tom's exultant voice: "That's one for his knob, David. Very nice work and I couldn't have done better myself... You O.K. in there, Jenny love?"

Peter answered for them both. "Yes, Tom. O.K. except for a nasty, dangerous woman in here. Just tell us so that she can hear. Are the police on

the way?"

"Yes, they are," David answered. "Dan's telephoning for them. They should be arriving any minute now. Can you open the door or shall we break it down? You all right, Peter ?"

"I am now. Just a sec..."

Jenny passed her the key and as Peter put it in the lock they both looked down at the woman still kneeling on the floor and knew that she was beaten. Peter unlocked and opened the door in time to see the two boys hauling the sandy-haired fishmonger to his feet.

"Hold him, Tom," David said, and then, after a quick glance at the woman now trying to get up, "Come out, girls. This chap will be a good exchange. Give me the key, Peter."

She passed it over, noticing as she did so that his face was swollen and his lip bleeding. He took the key and then suddenly his arms were round her. For a second he held her close and then put her behind him. Jenny was beside her and they saw the fishmonger pushed into their prison and the door locked on their enemies.

From far away they heard the warning siren of police cars and Tom, also looking rather battered, grinned at David.

"That's Dan that was. He's got a story this time but he's got to take us back to King's Holt first. Let's get down into the fresh air and you girls can tell us how you got caught."

"I'm feeling a bit sick and most peculiar, as Dickie would say," Jenny said faintly. "We knew you'd come, Tom. Did you remember we'd been here together? It is the fish shop, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's the fish shop. Early this morning I saw the sandy-haired bloke taking delivery of fish cases *from* the Colonel, and our guess is that he was not taking back salmon. When I saw him I remembered where we'd seen him before and realized that the Longdens are behind some gun-smuggling

racket. David and Dan and I had to walk round a bit until I recognized Rosemary Lane and then it was easy. His rotten little van is in the yard behind here now and we bet it's full of guns."

"Haven't you looked to see?" Peter asked David as she felt his arm round her.

"Actually no!" he said with a painful grin. "We had something else on our minds. The police are here now so let's go down."

So the four of them went into the morning sunshine as the first police car drove into the yard. David told the Sergeant in charge that there were two people locked in an upstairs bedroom who could help them and that the two young ladies before him were the missing girls. He also suggested that the shabby van should be searched together with the house and buildings round the yard.

Then Dan arrived. He kissed both girls enthusiastically, made a few rude, personal remarks about the boys' scars of battle and was delighted to hear who was safely locked in upstairs.

"They won't let me look inside the van yet," he said, "but what I want most is the true story of these two lovely, lovely girls. Just for me, darlings. Not anybody else," and he kissed them again. "Seriously though, I promised to take you back to King's Holt and I will. Bob Hunter and two or three more men are on their way now and W.P.C. Susan went immediately after I telephoned from Princetown, so the twins will be safe."

And so, before this dramatic day was very old, the scarlet Mini roared off to Yelverton, Two Bridges and King's Holt with an excited Dan at the wheel. Tom at his side had Jenny on his knee, and in the back a silent David and Peter sat very close together.

11. Up the Lone Piners

Mary and Dickie, with Macbeth straining at his lead between them, stood in the porch at King's Holt watching David and Tom hurry down the drive. Their brother turned twice to wave to them and when they went out of sight Mary said, with a suspicion of a catch in her voice,

"We're alone now, twin. Except for Mackie. They will find Peter and Jenny, won't they?"

"'Course they will. They'll bash everything up until they do... All the people in this house are our enemies now, Mary. All five of them. We've been here only a few days and now we're utterly surrounded by awful villains. I think they're all liars but as our dad is on the way I'm sure we'll manage. Better go back to our room now and lay some plans. Keep Mackie quiet."

The door at the end of their corridor was ajar and, as Dickie was sure he had closed it, he signalled to Mary not to speak and pushed it back a few inches. Chryssi was standing with her back to them, her ear pressed against the door of the room in which Tom had been sleeping. Dickie unclipped Macbeth's lead and as the dog barked she turned in shocked surprise.

"Have you lost the other earring, or have you come up here to bring us good news?" Mary asked sweetly. "We've been down to give our friendly little dog his little walkies... Say 'Good morning', Mackie."

Macbeth had never cared for the Cypriots and the dislike was mutual. He growled now as Chryssi said, "I do not know what 'little walkies' mean, but I come to say we would like to have breakfast early as there is much worry today. Your brother and the other boy do not answer my knock... You must hurry at once and come down to breakfast quick."

Mary called Macbeth to heel. "We don't like the way you speak to us, Chryssi, and we don't like you listening outside our doors."

"And we don't like you much either," came from Dickie, "so please go away. My brother and our friend will not be in for breakfast as they have gone for a walkies too."

And with that they marched into their room and locked the door.

"She was angry," Mary said thoughtfully. "Absolutely livid. It won't be much fun having breakfast down there by ourselves, will it? I feel peculiar about this house now."

Dickie had no intention of missing a breakfast and when they came down Marjorie Longden was already sitting at their table.

"Now come along, twins. I thought we might have our breakfast together. Chryssi tells me that the two big boys have gone for a walk although I can't think why."

"I expect they've gone to find the two girls because nobody else seems to be doing much about it," Mary suggested. "We hope our father will be here soon because we miss him very much and I would like to telephone our mother now."

Mrs. Longden persuaded her that it would be wiser to wait until after breakfast in case Mr. Morton arrived in the next half hour.

"And do try not to worry too much about the girls because I'm sure we shall have news of them soon. Tell me about your father, Dickie. What does he do?"

This was the first of several enquiries about their family and the Warrenders. They had to tell her that Mr. Morton was a lawyer but managed to parry most of her other questions. They sensed that although at first she was amiable enough, she was too excited and nervous to eat. Her mood changed when Dickie said,

"You've asked lots of questions about us but we've been wondering what has happened to Colonel Longden this morning? Did you know that he admires our little dog very much and is thinking of carving him? Perhaps

we could go and see him soon with Mackie and that will pass the time nicely until our father comes."

"You can't do that. The Colonel isn't having breakfast. He's busy and he's worried because the missing girls mean very bad publicity for King's Holt. We don't like it and I don't suppose that your friend Sturt will help by keeping quiet. The truth is that since you and your friends arrived there seems to have been nothing but unpleasantness. I hope your father will not be too long. We shall be making arrangements to close King's Holt as soon as possible," and with that she got up and walked out through the service door.

Dickie finished his toast before he spoke. "Mary, I'll say it again. I don't like what's happening in this house."

"Or what isn't happening, twin. I feel lonely. What's happened to Chryssi and the others? It's too quiet... I'm going to telephone Mother *now*. I want to speak to her and I wish Dad would come... Please fetch Mackie from our room while I get through."

There was nobody in the lounge or hall, and when Dickie came down with the dog his sister was standing outside the telephone box with tears in her eyes.

"Nothing happens, Dickie. It's dead. I keep on dialling the operator, but it doesn't work. You try."

Dickie had no luck either, but because Mary looked frightened he went to the empty Reception office and kept his finger on the bell push. They heard the bell ringing in the distance but it was at least two minutes before Marios appeared. He was in his shirt-sleeves and looked very annoyed. Dickie was angry too and forgot to be frightened.

"There's something wrong with the telephone, Marios. We must get through to London. Please get it right. It's important and urgent."

None of them had seen much of Marios who seemed only to appear when the Colonel had visitors. He was a well-groomed, dark little man and Mary

did not like the way in which he was looking at them.

"So you ring that bell because of the telephone? If it does not go that is because the stupid police have cut it. Go away!"

"Of course the police wouldn't do any such silly thing. You don't know what you're talking about, Marios. We want to see the Colonel or Mrs. Longden because it's very, very urgent for us to speak to London."

"Go away, silly little boy. Go away and do some more spy-work with your eye-glass... Horrible children. All was good here before you come... Get out with the dog. He is dirty and smells."

Macbeth must have understood his last words because he was straining at the lead before Mary released him. Marios did not wait for him but escaped through a door in the Reception office.

"He must be bonkers," Dickie said. "Just as well Mackie didn't have a chance to bite him. If he had he would have been poisoned... I'm fed up with this. Let's go and see if the Colonel is still in his workshop."

The white estate car was standing empty in the yard and the Colonel's workshop was locked. Dickie knocked twice on the door but there was no answer and it was then that Mary had her bright idea.

"Let's walk along the main road towards Dartmeet and meet Dad. He's sure to come through Ashburton, and as soon as we see the blue Triumph we'll wave like mad and he'll see us and it will be wonderful. When he comes everything will be all right."

Dickie agreed and they started at once without going into the house. Macbeth was put on the lead and it was not long before they reached Dartmeet. They rested for a few minutes on the bridge and noticed that there were already a few cars in the big car park. Mary suggested that this was a good place to wait for their father as they could see his car coming down the steep hill, but Dickie thought it would be easier for him to recognize them if they walked halfway up and waited on the right-hand side of the road. This proved to be a sensible idea but when they slowed down

after about 200 yards a car roared up the hill behind them and passed them at a dangerous speed. They were walking in single file with Dickie in front, but as Mary called out something about "road hogs", he ran forward waving his arms to a blue car coming towards them.

Mr. Morton stopped and opened the rear door.

"In the back quickly, twins. Any news of the girls yet?"

Dickie shook his head.

"Not yet, Dad, but David and Tom have got a clue and the police are helping and it's wonderful to have you here. There's so much to tell 'cos we've got mixed up with villains again. Please take us quickly to King's Holt and we'll tell you everything... Look out! There's a chap down there gone mad."

At the bottom of the hill by the car park a little man with a big camera dangling round his neck was hopping about in the middle of the road and waving his arms.

"My car! They've stolen my car!" he gasped as Mr. Morton stopped again. "Thieves and villains! Fetch the police... Help me... They must have passed you as you came down the hill... My grey Cortina and they've left their estate car in its place... Over there..."

"We can help this gentleman, Dad," Mary said. "The white estate car belongs to Colonel Longden of King's Holt and when we get back there we think there might be a Z Car waiting for us so we can tell the police about this. The grey Cortina did pass us just now and it was going so fast it frightened Mackie. Dickie was waving to you but I *b'lieve* I know the driver!"

Mr. Morton nodded approvingly. "Good, Mary..." Then, to the victim, "We'll report this theft when we get the chance. Would you recognize the driver again?"

"No, unfortunately not! I was down by the river taking photographs and only looked up in time to see my car being driven away... But I'm obliged to you for your assistance and will stay here until the police come."

"Who was the driver of the stolen Cortina, twin?" Dickie asked as their father drove off.

"I'm not sure because he was going so fast but he reminded me of that vile Marios... If it was that man, Dickie, it means that he also stole the Longdens' car. We'll tell you everything in a minute, Daddy, but we're hoping that our smashing Police Woman Susan has come to look after us... Don't look so worried because we do think the girls will be found soon. And don't be cross with us if we can't explain everything all at once."

He was not angry but far more worried than he cared to admit. Sometimes he wondered whether any of his children should be allowed out by themselves. He did not want to upset the twins by showing them that he doubted their optimism, but was relieved to see a Police patrol car parked outside the front door of King's Holt.

The smashing woman Police Constable stepped forward to greet them, and in reply to Mr. Morton's unspoken question she shook her head.

"Not yet, sir. No news is good news, we believe. We're glad you're here but have any of you anything further to tell me that will help us? What has happened since we left King's Holt last night and why did you go out this morning? And why is the house empty?"

Dickie took a deep breath and reported everything that had happened, including the theft of the Colonel's car and Mary reported that the driver was Marios. They told them how rude the Cypriot had been to them when they reported that the telephone was dead, and how jumpy and peculiar Mrs. Longden had been at breakfast with her talk of bad publicity for King's Holt.

"Have you seen the Colonel this morning?" W.C. Susan asked and they admitted that they had not and that his workshop had been locked.

"Thank you," W.P.C. Susan said as they finished, and she turned to speak to the patrol car driver who immediately contacted his control room.

Dickie was allowed to sit by the constable while the report was being made and heard him say, "O.K. Sarge. I'll hold it," and then he grinned and said, "News coming through, son. Stand by."

Dickie's heart thumped with foreboding - and then with excitement because the man smiled at him as he spoke to his Sergeant.

"Nice work, Sarge. I'll give 'em the glad tidings... Over." Then his arm went round Dickie's shoulders. "Cheer up, boy. Run and tell the others that your girls have been rescued by the two lads David and Tom and that they're safe and unharmed. They're on their way here with young Dan Sturt."

Dickie was out of the car before he had finished speaking

"Thanks!" he gasped. "Thanks a lot. I bet David found them. He's my brother... *The girls are safe, Dad.* They're on their way!"

The twins then begged their father to come to the end of the drive and wait for the rescue party, but before he did so he arranged for the police to send a message telling Mrs. Morton in London that all was well. Then, hand in hand with their father the twins walked down the drive and told him of their adventures since they arrived at King's Holt, of their suspicions of the Longdens and the peculiar behaviour of the Cypriots.

They were still talking when they heard the triumphant toot of a car and suddenly the scarlet Mini was turning into the drive. The Lone Piners were together again.

Jenny was the first out and seemed too shy to say anything. She was pale and big-eyed but she managed a smile when Mr. Morton kissed her. Both Tom and David showed the scars of battle and Peter, considering what she had been through, looked radiant and happy.

"We knew the boys would find us," she said. "They always do. We were silly to get caught by those horrible Longdens. Where are they now? Dan

doesn't know."

"Neither do we," Dickie said quickly and for the third time told all that had been happening.

"Do our parents know we're safe?" Peter asked.

"We believe they're on the way here now," Mr. Morton said. "There's no way of letting them know because we don't know where they are."

By now Dan was impatient.

"This is a wonderful reunion but I've got work to do. My pal Sergeant Hunter will be on his way to search the place with some experts and by now there will be a call out for the three Cypriots. Anybody want a lift up the drive? I must see what's going on up there."

David laughed. "Thank you, driver. It's been a good trip, but we'll be with you in five minutes as we'd rather walk."

Back at the house Dan was telling W.P.C. Susan about the battle of the fish shop, but when Peter and Jenny arrived she deserted him and took them indoors to question them.

The next event was the arrival of a Detective-Inspector and Detective-Sergeant Bob Hunter who both shook hands with David, Tom and Mr. Morton before going to see the girls.

Then Dan roared off to Plymouth and his paper with a promise to return later with a TV cameraman to interview them all.

"What about Mackie?" Mary asked as Dan adjusted his seat belt. "He's not had much of a holiday yet, poor little dog, and he's never been on the telly."

"He shall be," Dan promised. "Telly can't do without brave dogs and brave twins and, tell Peter and the redhead, that it must have brave, gorgeous girls. And tell the Sergeant I'll be back. See you!"

"Don't know what we should do without you all," the Sergeant smiled as he joined the Lone Piners. "We want to talk to the three Cypriots and I'm sure we shall find them soon. Trouble is that they may exchange cars again. Our problem now is the Colonel and his wife. There's nothing about their rooms upstairs to suggest they've gone off in a hurry and yet there's no doubt that the Cypriots stole their car... We've examined it at Dartmeet and although it smells of fish there's nothing else unusual about it... What's the matter with you, Richard? Have you found us another clue?"

"Sir Sergeant," Dickie replied, in what he thought was a conspiratorial voice. "Thank you very much. I would like to talk to you in privacy."

"He has something to impart," Mary added and then, with a whoop of joy pointed down the drive. "Look who's here! It's Uncle Alf Ingles' Land-Rover..."

Peter and Jenny led the race to the familiar old vehicle which had been driven through the night and was still stained with Shropshire mud. The first to step down was Mr. Sterling and Peter flung her arms round him.

"Daddy darling! Wonderful of you to come. We're both all right. David and Tom rescued us but we couldn't tell you before because we didn't know where you were."

He could find no words as she clung to him.

Mr. Ingles, who looked as if he had just stepped out of his own farmyard, was conducting a one-sided conversation at the top of his voice. He had one arm round Jenny and was pummelling Tom on the back with his free hand.

"...Now see who I've brought to see you, Jenny girl!" he roared. "Help your Mum down and tell her what you've been up to."

Carefully, but with dignity, Jenny's stepmother dressed in an old-fashioned "Sunday best" with a hat nobody had seen for years, descended from the Land-Rover.

"Hello, Mum," Jenny said in a small voice. "I'm O.K. Mum. Thanks for coming. Is Dad all right?" Mrs. Harman nodded and Jenny noticed that her lips were trembling and that neither of them knew what to say. And Peter, noticing this, came over with David and Mr. Sterling and they all tried to put her at her ease.

At last the Sergeant managed to detach the Lone Piners and assembled them in the yard by the Colonel's workshop.

"Richard has something special to tell me, and while we are talking I want you others to think of anything that has happened since you came here, which might help us to find the Longdens. Tom has told us that he saw the Colonel loading boxes on to two vans early this morning and we know now what was in them. We shall soon know something about the antique shop in Brixham as well. Dan Sturt has told us about the carved ponies and you've all seen the Colonel working on those. We know that plenty of fish boxes came in here and we also believe that the Colonel did sell his ponies wherever and whenever he could. We intend to open the workshop but we can see that there's nobody there...

"So put your heads together while our young detective and I have a conference."

Dickie took his latest hero up to his bedroom and told him of the discovery of the old plans at their camp. Then he brought out the metal container from under the mattress.

"The others know about these," he explained. "They weren't very interested - except Mary of course - but I've been wondering whether they've got something to do with the rebuilding and alterations to this house. And perhaps there are lots of things we can't see that have happened to the workshop where the Colonel spent so much time working on his ponies and selling them to all sorts of people... I thought, sir, that the people in Exeter who made the plans - you can just see the name in the corner, looks like Browning - might tell us something we want to know."

Hunter looked at him with respect.

"You're quite right, Richard. We will ask one of our detectives to make suitable enquiries at once. The Post Office have repaired the telephone. May I borrow your plans?"

"Yes, sir. You're welcome."

Downstairs the other Lone Piners had broken up their meeting and were in the kitchen helping Mrs. Harman and the three men to prepare a picnic meal. After speaking to one of the detectives and lending him the secret plans, Hunter and Dickie joined the others.

"Your son can come to me for a reference when he wants to join the Force," the Sergeant smiled at Mr. Morton. "We'll have news for you all in a few minutes. Thank you, I would like a cup of coffee."

Mary sidled round the table to her twin.

"We're going to make them look silly," Dickie whispered. "He thinks our secret plans are important. Our detective is working on them... I'm feeling a bit exhausted and empty. That peculiar breakfast is a long time ago and all this thinking is a strain... Please feed me, twin."

They were sharing a sandwich when the detective put his head round the door.

"Inspector wants a word with you, Sarge... I've got news," and he looked meaningly at Dickie and winked.

Sergeant Hunter was back in a few minutes.

"Richard has been very clever. We have just been told by the architects who designed all the recent alterations at King's Holt, that behind the workshop there is a secret strong room. We have found keys in the Colonel's dressing room and are about to take the workshop to pieces. We are not sure what we shall find, but as most of you are now aware, it is possible that there are smuggled firearms and explosives in the strong room. The Inspector wishes you to go into one of the upper rooms and wait there until we have made our inspection. At once if you please."

W.P.C. Susan was waiting at the foot of the stairs and spoke to Mr. Morton. "From the Longden's bedroom you can see into the yard, sir. The Inspector has no objection to the young people watching the proceedings if you have not."

Mr. Morton, who still felt out of touch with events, shook his head and they all followed him upstairs where the Lone Piners crowded round a big open window which overlooked the workshop.

None of them spoke, and so they could hear most of what the police were saying to each other in the yard. The Inspector was in charge and talking quietly to Bob Hunter. W.P.C. Susan stood behind them. One of the men then unlocked the workshop door and stood aside for the officers to go in. After a few minutes they came out and two constables took their place and began to clear out hundreds of carved ponies which, as the Lone Piners knew, were kept on the shelves against the back wall of the workshop. These were stacked in the yard and the men, with W.P.C. Susan, then waited outside the door which was closed as soon as the Inspector and Sergeant went in again.

Then a long silence in the yard and the bedroom, broken only by snores from Alf Ingles now asleep in a chair.

Suddenly the workshop door opened and Susan and the other two constables were called in. Three more long minutes ticked slowly by and then the two officers came out first - both looking grim. W.P.C. Susan came next, leading Marjorie Longden by the arm. The smart woman the Lone Piners had known now looked twenty years older and could not walk without help. Behind her, with a policeman on each side, marched the Colonel. He was pale and dishevelled but defiant, and as he stopped by Hunter they all heard him say, "But I tell you, Sergeant, that they forced us in there at gun point. There was nothing we could do. If you had not found us no doubt we should have starved to death. Those three villains must be found. As you see, my lady wife is near collapse."

"Quite so, sir," agreed Bob Hunter. "Mrs. Longden shall have every attention at the Police Station, but we must ask you to accompany us and help us. The two girls abducted by Mrs. Longden are safe and in our care,

and I'm sure it won't be long before your three servants are also helping us with our enquiries... Take him away."

As the Longdens were driven off with their escort, Jenny was the first to speak. She smiled shakily at Tom by her side and then turned to Dickie.

"Up the Lone Piners," she said quietly.

12. The Most Wonderful Day

"Up the Lone Piners," Jenny whispered. Down in the yard two cheerful policemen were packing the Colonel's carved ponies into wooden boxes and the workshop door was shut. Tom broke a long silence.

"I don't reckon that smooth Longden will ever go in there again. Wasn't only the girls who were taken for a ride, was it? What to do now?"

"Go downstairs and relax before the Sergeant starts asking more questions," Mr. Morton suggested. "And Mr. Ingles and I need some sleep."

Then Mrs. Harman said quietly to Jenny, "Come down to the kitchen with me, Jen. Whatever happens, we must eat, and seems to me it's time the women took over. Truth is, I don't care what the policemen say or what the so-called Colonel and his smarty wife have been up to, so long as you two girls are safe and sound... Come with us, Petronella."

"Of course, Mrs. Harman. Let's do that. Or let's make a start until the Sergeant calls some of us away." And then suddenly she added, "Jenny, does your father know we're safe? And what about Aunt Betty at Ingles?"

"That has been attended to, Petronella," Mrs. Harman replied, as she led the way out of the room. "They both send their love."

Sergeant Hunter was waiting for them at the bottom of the stairs.

"No doubt most of you are sick of the sight of policemen," he smiled. "But please be patient with us a little longer. I must ask the young people some questions and we certainly owe you all some explanation. Will you spare me ten minutes?"

When they were all gathered in the lounge, Sergeant Hunter began at once. "With the help of you young people, the police have made an important discovery. King's Holt was being used as a secret arsenal for firearms which were smuggled into Britain and then sold, or hired, to criminals for hold-ups, kidnapping, hi-jacking and armed robbery. We've known for some time

that in the past few years more and more criminal gangs were operating away from London and the big cities. King's Holt was evidently an unsuccessful experiment. Behind the shelves where the so-called Colonel kept his carved ponies are panels hiding a steel door which we opened with keys found in his dressing room. Inside this strong room are stored hundreds of revolvers and guns. Nor is there any way of opening this door from inside. If Richard had not remembered those secret plans, it would have taken us much longer to find the hoard of weapons."

"But the Longdens were shut in there," Mary gasped. "We heard the Colonel say that the Cypriots shut them in. If you hadn't found the door they might have-----"

"Yes, Mary, they might. So you see how Richard has helped us. What I would also like to say is that we know that the last few days have not been much of a holiday for you all. Your parents are tired, and although I still have to ask you more questions you may all, if you wish, leave here at once and stay at a hotel either in Two Bridges or Plymouth as guests of the police. Would you like to pack up now?"

This suggestion was received in silence until Alf Ingles stood up and spoke for them all.

"I don't reckon to know all that's been going on down here. What matters is that our girls are safe and so I'm saying straight that the best we can do is to go home now. And if you haven't guessed, Sergeant, home to us is Shropshire and our hills?"

"Good for you, Uncle Alf. Back to Ingles."

"And us for Witchend. Say we can, Dad."

Mr. Morton nodded. "Not keen on hotels, Sergeant. I'll take the three Mortons up to Shropshire after Mr. Ingles and I have had a rest. I know Mrs. Harman wants to feed us now, but I'd like ten minutes with you first. I'm sure you'll want to see Mr. Warrender who is part owner of King's Holt. He's a friend of ours and is touring in France but I can help you find him... As soon as you're ready, I'd like you to talk to these young people on their

own. Tell them - and they'll tell me later - as much as you feel able to about this villainy."

The Sergeant agreed. Alf Ingles went upstairs to find a bed while Mrs. Harman went into the kitchen with Mr. Sterling. The four older Lone Piners stayed in the lounge and the twins, with Macbeth, went out into the yard again.

W.P.C. Susan was talking to the driver of a police car.

"Hello, twins. I was just coming in to say 'Goodbye'. Don't let Dickie get too swollen-headed, Mary, although I'm not sure he shouldn't have a medal. And you were telling me that Macbeth really found the secret plans, so you're all three in it. I think that's nice. Thank you for helping us."

"You're our favourite policeman - I mean woman. I mean Police Constable," Dickie assured her, but Mary was not so confused. "We shall never forget you," she said. "Never. Thank you for coming. And we're sorry we didn't leave a message when we went to meet our father."

Then the driver, who had been absorbed by this conversation, passed the twins his notebook.

"Do something for me. Something I can show my grandchildren. Just give me your autographs. I bet you write alike."

"We don't," Mary said as she signed first. "He's worse."

"It's a pleasure," Dickie assured him as he signed with a flourish. "Thankyou for coming."

Susan remembered to pat Macbeth and to wave from the window before the patrol car sped down the drive.

"What a day!" Dickie said. "That was good about those plans, wasn't it, twin? It's a good rule never to throw away anything really mysterious. You never know. I've got plenty to ask the Sergeant. And another thing, I feel as if I hadn't been to bed for weeks. This is the longest day on record..."

The Sergeant was on the telephone when the twins went through the hall to join the others in the lounge. He was smiling as he followed them into the room and sat next to David and Peter on the sofa. Tom was on the arm of Jenny's chair and the twins fetched cushions and sat on the floor.

"I'm going to ask some questions as well as answer yours," the detective began. "You've given us plenty of information, but I must check up again to make my case. My news is that the three Cypriots have been caught near Heathrow. It seems they changed cars twice more on the way, which is a lesson to those people who won't lock their cars. As quickly as possible I'd like to know whether you were suspicious of those three before the woman doctored Peter's and Jenny's tea. And it's particularly important for me to know whether you ever had any misgivings about the Longdens."

They all had something to contribute to these questions and agreed that they were more uneasy about "Call-me-Marjorie" than they were about her husband. The girls mistrusted her from the beginning, thinking that she was a little too informal and friendly. Peter had soon been convinced that she didn't know much about horses, while Jenny considered that she was putting on an act and Mary that she was too noseey.

David admitted that the Colonel was pleasant enough although they hadn't seen much of him as he was always busy in his workshop. The Sergeant confirmed that his skill as a wood carver was genuine, and added, "It was a good cover for his other activities, but he gave too much time to it, didn't he? And from what you tell me - and what we know now - his workshop was a good place for him to conduct the more lucrative side of his business... What about his visitors? Did you see many of them?"

Dickie gave him a vivid account of "Jagman", but was distressed that he couldn't remember the number of the Jag. David then recalled that it had a London registration. Sergeant Hunter agreed with the Lone Piners that "Jagman" might have been a buyer for a gang, particularly as they had seen him loading his car with heavy cases that he said were ponies but which were probably guns.

"One day we may know how many of Longden's visitors were in the racket, and I'm not surprised that his wife encouraged you all to go out for the day

if he had an important customer coming. What about the Cypriots?"

Mary recalled her early morning interview with Marios when he had bullied them about the telephone. Jenny described Kina as a fat witch and Dickie dismissed Chryssi as a snooper.

Bob Hunter glanced at his watch.

"You've all been very helpful but I must go soon. I've got some more news for you but I must explain first that I'm sure the idea of persuading Mr. Warrender to let them manage King's Holt for him was an experiment. A Guest House for people keen on riding was a good cover for other criminal activities. If they had kept their nerve they might have got away with it. But they weren't ready when Mr. Warrender asked them to take you lot in."

"You mean they should have declined but didn't want to make Mr. Warrender suspicious and bring him down here making enquiries?" Peter suggested.

"That's so, Peter. But there was another reason. The Longdens have told us that they were not in control of King's Holt nor of an organization running a similar racket in the West Country."

The twins stood up while the two older couples stared unbelievably at the detective. "Go on," Peter whispered. "I think I've guessed. Who were giving the Longdens their orders?"

Tom gave the answer.

"The Cypriots, of course. Am I right, Sergeant?"

"I think so. They're being taken back to Plymouth now and we shall soon know more. It's obvious that they did lock the Longdens into the strong room and steal their car. It was smart to make a swap at Dartmeet, but bad luck for them that Mary recognized the car. I believe that Marios was the brain behind this particular show and in some way the Longdens were in his power. Does it seem like that to you now?"

They were bound to agree that it did, and it was Peter who spoke for them all when she thanked Sergeant Hunter for helping them. "Jen and I realize now that it might have been when we let the Longdens know that we had heard Dan's broadcast that they got panicky. Thank you for coming to help us out of that ghastly fish shop. Now that you've told us about the Cypriots I can understand that Kina might keep a stock of drugs in the house."

"You'd be surprised what W.P.C. Susan found in their rooms, Peter, but maybe *you* won't be surprised to hear that, as David and Tom suspected, the fish shop and sheds at the back had also been used for smuggled arms. There were plenty in the van which Tom saw being loaded this morning... That's all for now. I'm leaving two constables here and they'll tell you where to find me. Please ask Mr. Morton to get in touch before you leave."

As he went out they heard the telephone ringing. After a pause a policeman put his head round the door.

"Call for somebody called Peter. Says he's forgotten her other name."

David laughed. "Bet that's Dan. He would forget. Don't keep us long, Peter. I'm going to see how the cooking is getting on."

Sure enough David was right.

"Sorry I haven't been able to get back, Peter. I'm at Plymouth Police Station waiting for the Inspector to give his News Conference... Did you hear that they've caught your three Cypriots?... Soon as I can, Peter, I'll be over with a cameraman. You can tell the others, but I want to interview you specially - with the ponies, I thought... I want to see you again, Peter... Just you, I mean."

Peter hoped he could hear the smile in her voice.

"You don't really, Dan. You only want a good interview. None of us will ever forget how you helped to rescue us this morning but we're going home soon - back to Shropshire. Yes - all of us. Mr. Morton and Mr. Ingles are resting now, but as soon as they're ready we shall go. No time for interviews, Dan. We've all had enough of King's Holt. In an hour or two

there'll be nobody here except two policemen. But there is one thing you could do for me, and I'm sure you will. By the time they've finished nosing round here nobody will remember the three ponies. Will you see if you can get them over to your favourite stable at Ashburton? Will you do that for me, Dan?"

She smiled as she heard his laugh. "O.K. Peter. You win. You've no idea what I'd do for you. See you one day. You're my favourite girl and I hope you'll ask me to your engagement party - I'll see David there too... God bless."

She was still smiling when she joined the others for a magnificent lunch of soup, scrambled eggs and fried bacon. Mrs. Harman was in charge; Mr. Sterling in his shirt-sleeves was her competent but willing slave. They ate at the kitchen table and had reached the stage where Dickie announced, with what his mother would describe as his great gift for words, that he was gorged, when Mr. Morton arrived. Mrs. Harman broke four more eggs into the pan and turned to Tom.

"Better wake your uncle now, Thomas. I've already let him sleep longer than he said."

While the two refreshed men ate together, the others insisted that Mrs. Harman should sit with them and enjoy a cup of tea while they washed up. When that was done, David and Peter took Mr. Sterling on a tour of inspection of the house and the track up to the Moor. The twins went with them some of the way to show them Mount Morton. Jenny, Tom, Mrs. Harman and Mr. Ingles were left together.

"Out of this kitchen, Mum," Jenny said firmly. "There's nothing for you to do here now, and I want to take you for a walk. You'd enjoy that wouldn't you?"

Mrs. Harman and Tom both looked surprised but Mr. Ingles was quicker off the mark.

"Course she would, Jenny. Good idea. Young Tom and me will stay here and have a yarn about the farm. Go on, Mrs. H. Stretch your legs a bit

before a long drive."

"Very well, Jen. I'll come out for a bit. Might as well have a look at this Dartmoor there's such a fuss about."

Jenny took her out into the yard. A policeman on duty outside the workshop smiled at them and said, "Good afternoon, Madam. Lovely day now."

And so it was. The sun was shining out of a cloudless sky and there was no sound except the distant hum of traffic on the main road.

"You can't see much from here, Mum, but I don't want to take you far because you must be tired coming all that way from Barton. Let's go a little way up the drive... I've got something to ask you, Mum. Something else to say, too."

Mrs. Harman nodded but said nothing. Suddenly shy, she put her hand on her stepdaughter's arm. They stopped under the trees. A gentle breeze stirred the blue-green branches above them as the woman faced the girl whose love she had never even tried to win.

Jenny looked at her with sudden sympathy. She saw someone she hardly knew although they lived in the same house. A woman who looked after her beloved father and whom he cared for deeply. A woman with a sad face and anxious eyes, and hands worn with the work she did for others. A woman who had driven through the night with two men who were nearly strangers to a place of which she knew nothing, when she had heard that her stepdaughter was missing.

Jenny clasped her hands behind her back and held her head high.

"You told me Dad was all right, Mum. Why didn't he come to fetch me?"

"He wanted to come, Jenny, but knew you'd be O.K. with Tom, and I told him I wanted to come."

"Why? I thought you always hated me. Didn't you know that I'd want my Dad?"

"I expect I knew you would rather see him than me, Jen. I wouldn't have to be clever to know that, would I? Somebody had to be in the shop today, and when I told your father I would like to come he understood. You've never tried to understand, but when I heard what had happened I thought maybe you'd rather have a woman around. I didn't know what had happened to you."

Jenny flushed with shame, but before she could find the words to say she was sorry, Mrs. Harman went on "You've grown up, Jenny love. And so maybe have I. Let's both make a fresh start. If we could hit it off it would please your Dad and that's one thing we have in common. We both love him... Listen, Jen. I've always known that you're Tom's girl and so does your father. You thought I was jealous and maybe I was. One day you'll know that those who are older are often jealous of the younger. Run back to the house and fetch Tom, and I'll tell you both that the three of us are going to start again."

Jenny's eyes filled as she saw the tears on her stepmother's cheeks. She kissed her and raced back to the house.

"Come quickly, Tom. Mum wants to tell you something. This is the most wonderful day of my life! You rescued me and everybody here has been marvellous and now we're all going home. Come now, Tom! Mum is waiting for you."

"What does she want to tell me, Jen?"

"She says she knows now that I'm really your girl, Tom. I know she means it. Come with me and I'll be brave enough to tell her that I've been horrid to her and that everything will be different for us all... Come at once, Tom. We mustn't keep her waiting."

Alf Ingles was on his feet now and beaming at them both. Tom grinned at him and raised one thumb. Then he stooped and kissed his Jenny and walked out with her into the sunshine where Mrs. Harman was waiting for them.